

A Twentieth-Century Overview

When one looks at the complex history of Western music from roughly the turn of the seventeenth century to the turn of the twentieth, a fundamental given emerges: Music was in a key, a tonality, albeit a constantly evolving one. But, though tonality was the force that bound seemingly inimical musical approaches together (Bach's complex contrapuntal music and Vivaldi's skeletal, homophonic music, for example), no such binding force has materialized in this century.

For American composers, isolated to some extent from the deeply embedded tyranny of European tradition, the break with that tradition was more easily effected. Because music did not become a widespread curriculum in the American academic system until well after the beginning of the twentieth century, composers were not as affected as their counterparts on the Continent by the often reactionary nature of many European conservatories. And although Charles Ives did attend Yale and study with Horatio Parker, it is likely that his musical imagination was affected more by the sounds of New England picnics and firehouse bands than by conservatories and prim salons, as Harry Partch later would be more influenced by Yaqui Indian chant, while only surlily tolerating the Universities of Illinois and Wisconsin, which helped support him in the forties and fifties. (For the American rejection of European tradition, see W. Mellers' excellent "New Music in a New World" in *Twentieth Century Music*, edited by Rollo H. Myers.)

For some composers the loss of tradition created an excruciating impasse, a cultural no man's land. For others it provided an embarrassment of riches and the freedom to call on all traditions or, as legitimately, to reject them all. Whatever the choice, the diverse currents and crosscurrents of compositional activity in the twentieth century have one thing in common: a ceaseless energy devoted to redefining what is meaningful in music. This has led to an investigation anew of form, melody, harmony, and color, as well as expressive and material concerns.

A number of antithetical solutions have emerged. This century has seen the refined, ultra rational sophistication of Milton Babbitt (NW 80466-2) and Pierre Boulez, and simultaneously the primal art of Harry Partch (NW 80214-2). It has witnessed the potent hysteria of expressionism in Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg, and the cool detachment and understated character of Morton Feldman. It has also seen composers whose works are overtly or implicitly political--Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, Herbert Brün, and the more recent music of Christian Wolff--and composers who would deny any connection between music and the machinations of this century's politics.

Indeed, one can look on twentieth-century music as a fabric of interwoven lines, crisscrossing, fusing, and diverging, creating a contradictory, often fascinating tapestry, the result of the dissolution of a unifying tradition. And like the larger picture of twentieth-century music, the composers represented on this recording converge and diverge in many areas, both philosophically and aurally. Leo Ornstein was born in 1892 in Kremenchug, Russia. His musical talents were quickly discerned by Josef Hofmann, who, hearing the boy play the piano in 1902, offered him a scholarship to study at the conservatory in St. Petersburg. In 1907, fearing the increasingly violent pogroms directed by the Union of the Russian People against Jews, the Ornstein family moved to New York's Lower East Side. Ornstein continued his musical studies at the New York Conservatory, concertized

frequently, and composed.

In 1913, despite having "practically not been influenced by any current music" (Frederick H. Martens: *Leo Ornstein*, p. 39; see Bibliography), his previously conventional composition took a radical turn, eliciting from critics the labels "futurist," "cubist," and "ultramodern"; one English critic said that it was "equal to the sum of Scriabin and Schoenberg squared" (Martens, p. 24). From that time on he became a champion of modern music, giving concerts of his own works and those of contemporaries, among them Schoenberg, Albéniz, Scriabin, D'Indy, Debussy, Korngold, and Busoni, while including the music of older composers. He is credited with the New York premieres of Ravel's *Sonatine* and *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the customary attacks of conservative critics so prevalent during the first few decades of this century, Ornstein enjoyed great notoriety, which put into curious relief his retirement from the concert stage in 1920 (with the exception of scattered concerts until 1933). Ornstein gave the combined rigors of composing, practicing, and performing as the grounds for his disappearance from the public eye. Another reason may lie in the genesis of his more radical composition. In his biography of Ornstein, Martens described the manner in which Ornstein, in 1913, found his "true idiom":

...this new idiom was the outcome of a sudden mental illumination. Without any previous intimation he found that he had at last discovered ways and means to express his innermost emotions in tone, unfettered by any rule which might do violence to his individual concept. For weeks he lived in a daze, experimenting with, testing and perfecting the details of his new expressional mode. . . . [p. 17.]

Unlike that of Schoenberg, whose musical evolution occurred slowly and with great thought, Ornstein's music was revelatory, based more on emotional factors than on an intellectually evolved theory, and the key to Ornstein's music may well be this primacy of emotional self-expression:

The distinctive quality of the new impulse in art has been the need of expression through direct contact with the emotions--a rediscovery and restatement of man's experience. Art has torn itself from the admitted routines and honored idioms; it has come to realize the inadequacy of conceiving modern life according to the old formulae! [Martens, p. 49.]

Accordingly, he would make use of the musical style that would suit those needs, instead of clinging to the rightness of his new musical language for self-expression:

I have my diatonic and lyric moments, and on occasion I employ the diatonic scale for the simple reason that my own radical medium does not suit the purpose of what I want to say. [Martens, p. 43.]

It is easy to see how Ornstein, one of the century's first great eclectics, would have felt constrained by the growing fragmentation of the musical public into camps. Perhaps his retreat from public life was reaction against a label, against the expectation of radicalism enjoyed by his followers and deplored by his detractors.

Responsibility for this rigorous pursuit of artistic expression unhindered by traditional means lies with the period as much as with the man. The turn of the century saw a political revolution (as a boy Ornstein witnessed the violence of the revolution of 1905 in St. Petersburg) as well as a revolution in technology, art and music. It was a time of an unprecedented break with tradition. In discussing his own music, Ornstein said:

I honestly find this the most logical and direct idiom through which to express my musical impulse, thought and feeling. I cannot help contrasting it with one representing a compromise with traditional formulas which often react unfavorably on my spontaneity of inspiration. I find that existing tonal idioms do not allow me the perfect expression of all that I wish to say musically. And I have had to find a language of my own. [Martens, p. 43.]

Here is a document of a distinctly twentieth-century position, a self-conscious willingness to discard a convention and tradition that could no longer cope with the new perceptions and expressive needs of artists.

Philip Glass (b. 1937) received a B.A. from the University of Chicago and a master's degree from The Juilliard School. He held a Ford Foundation grant from 1962 to 1964 but felt a growing dissatisfaction with the music he was writing at the time. He later told David Bither of *Horizon* magazine (March, 1980):

At that point I had reached a kind of dead-end with the music, I couldn't do it anymore. Not that I couldn't, I could turn it out easily. That was the problem, I just didn't believe in it anymore.

Indeed, a fundamental problem began to intrude itself:

I didn't have anything of my own to say. I was so busy imitating academic music that I'd never really understood the fundamentals.

So he went to Paris to join a distinguished list of composers who had studied with Nadia Boulanger. While there he met Ravi Shankar and notated Shankar's score to the film *Chappaqua*. This exposure to Indian music opened up a new musical world. Glass told Charles Michener of *Newsweek* (May 26, 1975):

...there was a way to write music that would take me outside my own history...Ravi, not drugs, was my acid trip. It was like totally clearing all my decks, and overnight I began writing a completely different kind of music.

On his return to this country in 1967 he began composing a bare, static, single-line music, from which were purged chromaticism and modulation. This back-to-scratch unison music eschewed the seemingly unnatural and unfulfilling rigor of the complex music of the universities ("I found twelve-tone music ugly and didactic", Glass told Robert Jones of *Cue Magazine* in May 1978). The disappearance of foundation support and the lack of university interest in Glass's work attest to the

fact that this new music was far outside the mainstream of the avant-garde (if the oxymoron will be permitted). From 1967 to 1974 he performed his music in New York lofts, and his principal support came from artists and art foundations, especially those of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Glass told John Rockwell in a 1972 *New York Times* interview:

My ideas were very close to those of painters and sculptors in the mid-sixties but they weren't derived from them...Artists aren't very intellectual, and my music is very accessible. It has a physical presence people can respond to. Artists are very eager to get art out of the academy.

Glass's progress from the monophonic ground zero has been, like the term he uses to describe his compositional procedure, "additive"; he has labored to expand, develop, and add interest in musical areas he had left static. The considered anti-intellectualism, the lack of interest in rigorously logical, linear processes has remained, and is illustrated by his collaboration with Robert Wilson, the opera *Einstein on the Beach*, which was premiered in 1976. Significantly, the Einstein of this work is a dreamer. The emphasis in this nonlinear collection of events and scenes is on intuition, visceral sensations, dreams, fantasies, and disjointed images, not on progressive development.

The influence of Eastern philosophy on Western art has been felt for several decades, but Philip Glass's contribution to Eastern-inspired music has been unique. Unlike his predecessors, he uses musical materials familiar to Western audiences. The philosophical underpinnings, concerned with the meditative and transcendental, are expressed in materials indigenous to Western music, transforming a foreign culture's aesthetic and philosophical orientation into a language we can understand. This synthesis between Eastern aesthetic ideology and Western musical materials may account for Glass's popularity with a broad audience. He has taken music out of the academy and put it into parks, museums, churches, rock clubs, even traditional concert halls and opera houses--and has generated an audience enthusiasm and acclaim that the majority of today's composers of serious music never attain.

A short account of the compositional development of Aaron Copland (1900-1990) can be found in David Hamilton's notes to NW 277. Relevant here is Copland's incorporation of jazz in two works of the late twenties, *Music for the Theater* (1925) and the *Symphonic Ode* (1929), responses to a desire to compose music with a specifically American character. Copland felt the limitations of this symphonic jazz, and his works during the next few years--including the *Piano Variations* (1930), *Short Symphony* (1933), and *Statements for Orchestra* (1934)--were most abstract. Critical response to these pieces was predominantly negative, but, more important, the excited audience dissension that had marked his previous works gave way to apathy.

Copland's music of the next fifteen years was different in its use of materials and in its overall style, intended for greater audience accessibility. The works for which Copland is best known today, *El Salón México* (1936), the ballets *Billy the Kid* (1938) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944), and the film scores *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and *Our Town* (1940), all come from that period. A number of factors, as telling about the time as they are about the man, prompted this appeal to a wider audience. Copland, who always strove to promote American contemporary music, no doubt looked on the dwindling audience for new music with alarm. In addition, monetary support, so plentiful in the twenties, all but disappeared during the Depression of the thirties. And the Depression itself affected the way

artists thought about themselves and their society. There was a growing concern for the qualities and plight of the American people, a consciousness of their collective struggle, and a desire to help. In his book *Aaron Copland* (New York: Oxford, 1953, p. 29), composer and writer Arthur Berger (NW 80360) observes:

The vein of optimism and patriotic sentiment, formerly confined to Rotarians and conservative artists, became *the thing* in the ranks of the *avant-garde*, and even composers who were unaware of the sociological origins fell in line, responding to what they thought was a purely creative trend.

Finally, Copland was one of the first composers to recognize the importance of film and radio, both of which demanded more accessible music for wider audience appeal.

Copland perceived, perhaps correctly, that pursuing the more esoteric regions of musical thought would consign his work to the museum. His acknowledgment of this danger is symptomatic of an unprecedented fragmentation in this society into regions of serious music on the one hand and popular music on the other, between a well-preserved symphonic tradition and new music, between composers of commercial music and composers in universities, and between the culture industry's widely disseminated offerings and the serious music played in small halls for tiny audiences. The influences in Copland's more accessible music have not, to any significant audible degree, found their way into his more "esoteric" music. No reconciliation or synthesis of these approaches has been attempted by Copland. Toward the latter part of the twentieth century, some composers made an attempt to integrate, in single works, the dissonant, difficult music of our time with the more accessible.

The diversity of styles in the twentieth century has found expression in a relatively recent approach to composition that may well be called the new eclecticism. Proponents of this approach assert that because today's society has greater familiarity with our cultural past and through communications technology, with other cultures, today's composer is justified in making use of a broader spectrum of musical and cultural materials. Like Ornstein earlier in the century, some composers have felt that rigorous stylistic purity (so important to earlier composers who were trying to replace tonality with an equivalently airtight system) is an obstacle to a richer and more expressive compositional palette. These composers, enthralled at first with the avenues opened by Schoenberg's "method of composition with the twelve tones" and other composers' subsequent serial developments, later found the expressive capabilities of these procedures limited. Accordingly, composers have incorporated different musical styles and approaches in single compositions. For many, this represents a positive direction, replacing the destructive denial of Western cultural processes espoused by the Cageans in the fifties and sixties on the one hand, and the dogmatic insistence on stylistic purity by the serialists on the other, with a musical language that permits music of many times and cultures to coexist--a kind of panhistorical, panworld music.

Richard Wernick (b. 1934) is an advocate of stylistic eclecticism. In a *New York Times* article (May 8, 1977), he said of his teachers, who included Irving Fine and Leon Kirchner:

I was very fortunate because of their wide diversity of styles. Fine was a neo-classicist, Kirchner was completely different, with his intensity and chromaticism. Each one

filled in a gap. The kind of eclecticism that is in my music is the result partly of my temperament, partly of the diversity of training.

Another key to Wernick's eclecticism may be his multifaceted background. He received his musical education at Brandeis and then in 1957-58 was the composer for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. From 1958 to 1964 he composed music for films, television, and theater. Unlike Philip Glass, who found the university restricting, Wernick found it liberating. In the same *Times* article, he wrote about the commercial music world: "After a while the compromises that had to be made became too severe for me. I was thirty, and in order to write concert music I felt that the university was the place to be." He has taught at the University of Pennsylvania since 1968.

Wernick's eclecticism concerns itself not only with a diversity of musical styles but also with an invocation of the more profound musical expressions of other cultures. His *Kaddish-Requiem* of 1971 provides a good example. The piece contains ancient Hebrew chant; fragments of a seventeenth-century Lassus motet; sharp, contemporary dissonances; and sixteenth-century Palestrina-like modal harmony. What emerges is a juxtaposition of styles and symbols whirling around and interacting in a multidimensional musical space. Ultimately, Wernick's work is highly symbolic and allegorical. Unlike those works that maintain their purity and nonrepresentational character, Wernick's compositions often intentionally express something outside their purely musical content: the hope for positive human relations, redemption, and peace.

It is quite possible that old modes of thinking and perceiving are no longer appropriate for the comprehension of art in the twentieth century. As a culture we have been interested in creating a hierarchical scale and in judging works accordingly. The terms "good," "better," "best," the language of our critics, and the insipid superlatives of the advertising industry with its pervasive influence, have helped strip the uniqueness from disparate offerings, leaving in their wake an illusory single standard for judgment.

Given the richness of artistic exploration in this century, hierarchies for judgment aimed at comparing different, incomparable artistic philosophies and results may well be obsolete. Rather, we need to perceive artistic offerings not on a scale, but as part of a spectrum--a spectrum that realizes the uniqueness and richness of this century's artistic exploration. Nobody asserts the ubiquitous high quality of art today, and it is probable that the twenty-first century will retain only the composers and works it considers most talented, interesting, and worthwhile.

Nevertheless, we must regain our childlike curiosity, and, like a child on the beach, we must enjoy digging in the sand. Occasionally we will uncover some gems. But the real thrill is that of seeking, exploring, and expending our own creative energies. The very future of music may depend on our evolution from a hierarchical, product-oriented culture to one that delights in exploration, discovery, and the creative ability to come to grips with the diversity that marks our epoch.

Aaron Copland **Duo for Violin and Piano**

Although Aaron Copland's programmatic music of the thirties and forties was not substantially reflected in the musical style of his more esoteric chamber works, it spawned a corollary body of

chamber music, of which the Duo for Flute and Piano (1971) is part. Arranged by the composer in 1979 for violin and piano and edited by Robert Mann (who premiered this arrangement), this work abstracts the musical impulses of Copland's ballet and film scores and makes liberal use of these evocative elements. By appealing to the programmatic context in which this familiar music has been heard, Copland is able to add an associative, pictorial imagery to the usually nonrepresentational medium of chamber music.

Unlike the Ornstein Sonata, in which contradictory musical characters are frequently juxtaposed, each of the three movements of the Duo concentrates primarily on one musical character. The first movement is marked "Flowing," and its simple melodic construction and harmonic language are reminiscent of *Appalachian Spring*. Movement two, "Poetic, somewhat mournful," is characterized by the bell-like repetition of piano tones (recalling "Le Gibet" in Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*) and the exotic, constantly changing scale-like melodies of the violin. The gently tolling bell of the piano gives rise slowly and inexorably to greater and greater musical intensity. The third movement, "Lively, with bounce," opens with a melodic violin phrase that Copland alters in various ways--inverting it, elongating or shortening it, and setting it off against the piano. Following this melody through the course of the movement may be a way to understand some of Copland's compositional procedures.

Philip Glass

Violin Solo Music from Einstein on the Beach

Philip Glass's suite from *Einstein on the Beach* consists of violin music from the opera's "knee plays" ("joints" that separate and flank the work's nine scenes). The suite exemplifies the composer's interest in additive structures--repeating cells and phrases with various slight alterations, removals, or additions of pitches--reminiscent of Indian compositional techniques. The result is an elastic, contracting and expanding phrase structure that examines and reexamines the same material from slightly different angles.

The form of the work can be outlined as follows:

A B A' C A" B A' C'

The basis of the "A" section is a four-note motive of ascending half steps and a whole step: B C D^b D[#]. Reminiscent of a Baroque ground bass, this motive is repeated several times. However, interpolated between the pitches of the main motive are changing arpeggios (descending and ascending chains outlining triads). The frequency of the occurrence of the motivic tones, and the resultant rhythmic configurations, depend on how elaborate the interpolations are. The "B" section is easily recognized by the slower tempo and *espressivo* character. A relationship can be drawn between the predominant construction of this section and the Baroque passacaglia, as an unaltered series of chords provides the harmonic underpinning on which the melodies are elaborated. The "C" section is characterized by strings of ascending and descending scales, easily distinguished from the "A" and "B" sections, both of which are composed of arpeggios rather than scales.

Leo Ornstein

Sonata for Violin and Piano

The surface radicalism of Ornstein's Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 31 (1913), is immediately apparent in the use of tone clusters and the complete repudiation of functional tonal harmony. The unflagging intensity of the work demonstrates an impatient rejection of conventional models for pacing and drama. Like other early twentieth-century art (Expressionist painting, the theater of Strindberg, Schoenberg's *Erwartung*), Ornstein's Sonata ignores the traditional balance between tension and release, between material and emotional rigor and the obligatory points of rest; instead, its material demands attention for greater periods of time, resulting in heightened emotional intensity. Theodor Adorno's formulation to describe the complexity of events in Schoenberg's music, "Enough is not enough," could just as well apply to this piece.

Opposing forces are juxtaposed over greatly compressed time spans: there are flurries of fits and starts, tempo changes, extreme dynamic differentiation, and a hitherto unparalleled proximity of music of completely different characters. Such great changes in tone, in character, and ultimately in the intellectual and psychological demands made on the listener constitute a twentieth-century artistic phenomenon. Ornstein's music is that of a fragmented culture and marks the advent of a faster, psychologically more pressured age.

Richard Wernick **Cadenzas and Variations II (for Violin alone)**

Cadenzas and Variations II (for Violin alone), composed in 1970, is one in a series of virtuosic string pieces. Cadenzas and Variations I is for viola and piano, III is for cello alone, and a fourth is projected for double bass.

Cadenzas and Variations II is comprised of a theme, five variations, and two cadenzas, all of which flow smoothly into one another. Describing the work's variation concept [in an interview with the author], Wernick has said:

Whereas variations of the Classical period embellished a set harmonic scheme, I used the term "variation" the same way Stravinsky did in his ballet *Jeu de Cartes*, meaning simply, a dance. Nevertheless, although there is freedom in the treatment of the material, four of the five variations and both cadenzas are workings out of the initial theme.

Manifesting Wernick's interest in music of the past, each of the variations and cadenzas is given a descriptive subtitle referring to its character, its stylistic influence, or both. For example, Cadenza I, subtitled "Fantasia," and Cadenza II, subtitled "Chaconne," use similar material; but, according to the composer, Cadenza I is reminiscent of the virtuosic string technique of the Romantic period, whereas Cadenza II utilizes the rhythms and techniques of a Baroque chaconne.

One of the primary compositional techniques in the variations is the presence of the theme, with shorter or longer interpolations between each of the theme tones. The cadenzas, on the other hand, assimilate the theme tones and do not maintain the explicit identity of the theme.

—Perry Goldstein

Composer Perry Goldstein has written extensively on modern music for National Public Radio, Musical America,

The New York Times, the Library of Congress, and Carnegie Hall. He is currently (1995) on the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Gregory Fulkerson has performed extensively in both the contemporary and standard repertoires of violin literature, and won first prize at the Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition in 1980. Mr. Fulkerson studied at Oberlin College and The Juilliard School, where his teachers included Paul Kling, David Cerone, Robert Mann, and Ivan Galamian. He has given the world premieres of works by John Becker, Richard Wernick, and Roy Harris.

Alan Feinberg, pianist, was born in New York. He received both bachelor's and master's degrees at The Juilliard School. He was a prize winner in the 1978 John F. Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition. Mr. Feinberg has recorded with CRI, New Albion, Argo, and Nonesuch Records.

Robert Shannon, pianist, performed with Gregory Fulkerson in the 1980 John F. Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition. A graduate of Oberlin College and The Juilliard School, Mr. Shannon studied with Vladimir Ashkenazy, Ania Dorfman, and Jack Radunsky. He has performed at the Grand Teton Music Festival and the Festival Tibor Varga.

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*Readers will find the works by Adorno prohibitively difficult. Nevertheless, he is one of the most eclectic and penetrating thinkers this century has produced, and it is probably not overstating the case to suggest that he has explored the relationship between music and philosophy more rigorously than any other thinker of this century.

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Aaron Copland

See current Schwann catalog.

Richard Wernick

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Songs of Remembrance. Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano; Oscar Ghiglia, guitar; Philip West, shawm, English horn, and oboe. Nonesuch H-71342.

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CADENZAS & VARIATIONS 80313-2

GREGORY FULKERSON, violin

Aaron Copland

Duo for Violin and Piano (publ. Boosey and Hawkes)

I Flowing

II Poetic, somewhat mournful (attacca)

III Lively, with bounce

Robert Shannon, piano

Philip Glass

Violin Solo Music from *Einstein on the Beach* (publ. Dunvagen Music Publisher)

Leo Ornstein

Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 31 (publ. Joshua Corporation)

I

II

III

IV

Alan Feinberg, piano

Richard Wernick

Cadenzas and Variations II (for Violin alone) (publ. Theodore Presser Company)

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