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Changing Approach to Analysis of 12-Tone Music

RALPH LORENZ

A small yet significant change is taking place in the way we teach and think about 12-tone music. Readers of Joseph Straus's excellent book, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, will have noticed that one of the biggest changes from the first edition (1990) to the second (2000) is a different system for labeling row forms in serial music. Instead of labeling the initial prime form of the row as P_0 , regardless of starting pitch class, the analyst now labels the original form of a row as P_n , where "n" represents the starting pitch-class integer in the fixed system that always equates C with 0. This difference is illustrated through Table 1, the twelve-tone row used by Arnold Schoenberg in the Menuett and Trio from his *Suite for Piano*, Op. 25 (1923).¹ In the traditional system this would be labeled P_0 , but in the newer system it is called P_4 , because it commences on E, pitch-class integer 4. In this article I will explore the history of these two analytical approaches, reasons for the emergence of the newer system, and present-day pedagogical ramifications of dealing with both systems [Table 1].

Straus himself says very little about the change, other than a brief sentence in the preface where he lists the new material found in the second edition.² In other recent publications, the older movable system continues to be employed by many authors, including David Cope (2001), Bryan Simms (1996), J. Kent Williams (1997), Elliott Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey (1992), Stefan Kostka (1999), and Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca (2001).³ Justin London's website that lists row forms from the Second Viennese School uses the traditional system.⁴

The traditional system has not always been standardized; early treatments of dodecaphony had many forms, including the following representative examples.⁵ The first books to deal with the 12-tone system were by Ernst Krenek.⁶ Krenek and Reginald Smith Brindle use "O" for prime and avoid the use of index numbers.⁷ Schoenberg called the row a set, or "basic set (BS)." He used a type of index number in "Composition with Twelve Tones" where "INV 6" represents inversion at a major sixth from the beginning tone.⁸ Peter Evans refers to transpositions of the row as "B.S. major third lower," "B.S. 5th lower," and so on.⁹ David Lewin represents P_0 as \emptyset_0 in one article,¹⁰ while Charles Wuorinen represents it as S_0 .¹¹ In Milton Babbitt's early use of the matrix, he numbered the prime forms 1-12, and for retrograde forms he followed the Arabic numeral with an "R" (e.g., 1R); he numbered the inversions I-XII, and for retrograde-inversion he followed the Roman numerals with an "R" (e.g., XIIIR).¹² Leon Dallin uses "O-1" to refer to the original form.¹³ The employment of " P_0 " to refer to the original form was starting to find use by the early 1960s.¹⁴

⁵ As Lyn Burkett pointed out to me, composers had little reason to standardize the terminology and labeling system. It was not until textbooks started appearing with the task of teaching serialism to music students that the use of the matrix and terminology had higher motivation for standardization.

⁶ Ernst Krenek, *Music Here and Now*, trans. Barthold Fles (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939); *Studies in Counterpoint Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique* (New York, G. Schirmer, 1940).

⁷ Ernst Krenek, *Studies in Counterpoint: Based on the Twelve-Tone Technique* (New York, G. Schirmer: 1940); Reginald Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁸ Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 225.

⁹ Peter Evans, "Copland on the Serial Road: An Analysis of Connotations," *Perspectives of New Music* 2/2 (1964); reprinted in Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone, eds., *Perspectives on American Composers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 147-55.

¹⁰ David Lewin, "A Theory of Segmental Association in Twelve-Tone Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 1 (1962); reprinted in Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone, eds., *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 180-207.

¹¹ Charles Wuorinen, *Simple Composition* (New York: Longman, 1979).

¹² Milton Babbitt, "An Introduction to the Music," notes to Arnold Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron* (1957), LP, Columbia Records K3L-241.

¹³ Leon Dallin, *Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition: A Guide to the Materials of Modern Music*, 3d ed. (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1974), 192.

¹⁴ Perle credits Babbitt for introducing the term "prime" as a substitute for "original." Milton Babbitt, "The Function of Set Structure in the Twelve-Tone System, 1946," reproduced in typescript by Princeton University, Department of Music; cited in

¹ This piece may be found in Mary H. Wennerstrom, *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 174-77.

² Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 2d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), viii.

³ David Cope, *New Directions in Music*, 7th ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2001); Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 2d ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996); J. Kent Williams, *Theories and Analyses of Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997); Elliott Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey, *Music Since 1945: Issues, Materials, and Literature* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992); Stefan Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*, 2d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999); Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

⁴ Justin London, "Row Forms in the Serial Works of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern," <http://www.carleton.edu/curricular/MUSC/resources/2ndviennese.htm>, accessed 6 August 2001.

Writers who have used the newer approach include Martha M. Hyde and Paul Griffiths, but they do not discuss their reasons for doing so.¹⁵ Griffiths states “There is no one standard convention for naming serial forms. . . . the subscript numeral is the pitch-class number of the initial pitch class. . . .”¹⁶ This system was apparently initiated by George Perle in the 1977 edition of *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, for reasons detailed below.¹⁷ Therefore, it is interesting that in Griffiths’ *New Grove* (2d ed.) article on serialism, he does not list any of Perle’s writings in the bibliography.¹⁸

The contents of a 12 x 12 matrix, if presented as note names, will look the same regardless of the approach.¹⁹ The only difference will be how the various row forms are labeled. Tables 1 and 2 show the matrix for Schoenberg’s row from the Menuett and Trio (Op. 25), labeled according to the two approaches; Table 1 represents the traditional approach, while Table 2 illustrates the new approach. The pitch-class formulations within the matrices are the same; only the row-form labels differ. On the other hand, the contents will differ if pitch-class integers are used; in the traditional format the top row (P₀) starts on “0,” while in the new format the top row (P₄) starts on “4.”

What are the strengths of each system, and what are the current pedagogical ramifications of having two systems in common use?

George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 3 n.4.

¹⁵ Martha M. Hyde, “A Theory of Twelve-Tone Meter,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 6 (1984): 14-51; Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: The Avante Garde Since 1945* (New York: George Braziller, 1981).

¹⁶ Griffiths, “Serialism,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 23, 116-23.

¹⁷ Perle, *Twelve-Tone Tonality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 1 n.2. He explains this change in the Preface to the sixth edition of *Serial Composition and Atonality: An Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vii.

¹⁸ Perle is represented in *New Groves II*, however, as he and Paul Lansky wrote the entry for “Twelve-note composition.”

¹⁹ The magic square in its dodecaphonic application was a post-Schoenberg implementation. Krenek, in *Studies in Counterpoint*, writes out forty-eight row-forms by providing the twelve transpositions of the O-I-R-RI sequence (28). One of the earliest examples, possibly the first published example of the magic square, is found in Milton Babbitt’s “An Introduction to the Music,” notes to Arnold Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron* (1957), LP, Columbia Records K3L-241. Perle presents the matrix, called a “table of set forms,” with the common traditional labels in “Babbitt, Lewin, and Schoenberg: A Critique,” *Perspectives of New Music* 2 (1963): 120-32; this is possibly the first published article to utilize the matrix as an analytical tool. The matrix did not find common use in textbooks until the 1970s; see for example Dallin, *Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition*, 3d ed. (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1974); Bruce Benward, *Music in Theory and Practice* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1977).

There is no doubt already in existence a large body of analysis done the traditional way, and students will encounter these analyses in the overwhelming majority of cases in their outside reading; for that reason alone, they must be familiar with the traditional system. This system also allows one to immediately know the exact relationship between any row-form and the original row; this information can be very revealing about certain structural details. Thus, in the first movement to Schoenberg’s Fourth String Quartet (Op. 37), one can easily see from the traditional label that Schoenberg must have intended to have a correlation in m. 66 between the second tonal area (dominant key) of a classical sonata form and transposition by perfect fifth in his use of P₇.²⁰

In the newer fixed system, labeling is a much easier process without having to make constant reference and comparison to the initial pitch level. With the fixed standard, students always know immediately what the correct index number is. Computations for transformations such as inversion are easier to make in the newer fixed system. For instance, inverting pitch classes around a constant C is an easier task than inverting around a variety of other pitch classes. The newer system carries less implication for equating “0” with tonic qualities that would certainly be problematic for a body of literature that is primarily atonal.²¹

Perle gives two reasons for instituting the newer system.²² First, inversionally related dyads, what he terms “P/I dyads,”²³ will receive consistent treatment in their naming. He demonstrates with two rows from Alban Berg’s opera, *Lulu*, where he shows that two different combinations of rows maintain invariant dyads: the Basic Series P₀/I₇ and Dr. Schoen’s Series P₇/I₀. The pitch-class sums of the P/I dyads remain constant, a fact that is evident under the new system. Perle finds this property to be important elsewhere, in pieces such as Berg’s *Lyric Suite* and Bartók’s Fourth String Quartet. Perle’s second reason for the new system is that the sometimes problematic issue of determining which presentation of the row is actually the “prime” form is reduced. Predetermining which form is referential is no longer necessary.

Which system should be taught to students in present-day classes? Because both systems have become prevalent, we ought to insure that students be conversant with both approaches. Having taught both ways, I have found that students prefer the newer fixed approach, due to the greater ease of labeling and recognizing row forms. Although the majority of published analyses follow the traditional model, it is likely that future publications will increasingly use the newer fixed approach.

²⁰ This movement may be found in Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: An Anthology* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 207-38.

²¹ David Lewin discusses the problematic “tonic” implications for both fixed and movable systems in “A Label-Free Development for 12-Pitch-Class Systems,” *Journal of Music Theory* 21 (1977): 29-48.

²² Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, ix.

²³ Perle, *Twelve-Tone Tonality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 6.

Table 1. Traditional format of 12 x 12 matrix, row from Schoenberg's Op. 25.

	I ₀	I ₁	I ₃	I ₉	I ₂	I ₁₁	I ₄	I ₁₀	I ₇	I ₈	I ₅	I ₆	
P ₀	E	F	G	Db	Gb	Eb	Ab	D	B	C	A	Bb	R ₀
P ₁₁	Eb	E	F#	C	F	D	G	C#	A#	B	G#	A	R ₁₁
P ₉	Db	D	E	Bb	Eb	C	F	B	G#	A	F#	G	R ₉
P ₃	G	Ab	Bb	E	A	F#	B	F	D	Eb	C	Db	R ₃
P ₁₀	D	Eb	F	B	E	C#	F#	C	A	Bb	G	Ab	R ₁₀
P ₁	F	F#	G#	D	G	E	A	Eb	C	Db	Bb	Cb	R ₁
P ₈	C	C#	D#	A	D	B	E	Bb	G	Ab	F	Gb	R ₈
P ₂	F#	G	A	Eb	Ab	F	Bb	E	Db	D	B	C	R ₂
P ₅	A	Bb	C	F#	B	G#	C#	G	E	F	D	Eb	R ₅
P ₄	G#	A	B	F	Bb	G	C	Gb	Eb	E	C#	D	R ₄
P ₇	B	C	D	G#	C#	A#	D#	A	F#	G	E	F	R ₇
P ₆	Bb	Cb	Db	G	C	A	D	Ab	F	Gb	Eb	Fb	R ₆
	RI ₀	RI ₁	RI ₃	RI ₉	RI ₂	RI ₁₁	RI ₄	RI ₁₀	RI ₇	RI ₈	RI ₅	RI ₆	

Table 2. New format of 12 x 12 matrix, row from Schoenberg's Op. 25.

	I ₄	I ₅	I ₇	I ₁	I ₆	I ₃	I ₈	I ₂	I ₁₁	I ₀	I ₉	I ₁₀	
P ₄	E	F	G	Db	Gb	Eb	Ab	D	B	C	A	Bb	R ₄
P ₃	Eb	E	F#	C	F	D	G	C#	A#	B	G#	A	R ₃
P ₁	Db	D	E	Bb	Eb	C	F	B	G#	A	F#	G	R ₁
P ₇	G	Ab	Bb	E	A	F#	B	F	D	Eb	C	Db	R ₇
P ₂	D	Eb	F	B	E	C#	F#	C	A	Bb	G	Ab	R ₂
P ₅	F	F#	G#	D	G	E	A	Eb	C	Db	Bb	Cb	R ₅
P ₀	C	C#	D#	A	D	B	E	Bb	G	Ab	F	Gb	R ₀
P ₆	F#	G	A	Eb	Ab	F	Bb	E	Db	D	B	C	R ₆
P ₉	A	Bb	C	F#	B	G#	C#	G	E	F	D	Eb	R ₉
P ₈	G#	A	B	F	Bb	G	C	Gb	Eb	E	C#	D	R ₈
P ₁₁	B	C	D	G#	C#	A#	D#	A	F#	G	E	F	R ₁₁
P ₁₀	Bb	Cb	Db	G	C	A	D	Ab	F	Gb	Eb	Fb	R ₁₀
	RI ₄	RI ₅	RI ₇	RI ₁	RI ₆	RI ₃	RI ₈	RI ₂	RI ₁₁	RI ₀	RI ₉	RI ₁₀	

Concert Review

Three Derriere Guard Festivals

STEFANIA DE KENESSEY

The First Derriere Guard Festival of 1997 showcased the chamber music of Eric Ewazen whose current CDs include *Shadowcatcher* with the Juilliard Wind Ensemble (on New World Records) and *Bass Hits* (on Albany Records). A prolific and brilliant composer of chamber and orchestral music, his work for brass ensembles deserves special mention; his music is tuneful, sweeping and richly textured. A native of Cleveland, Ewazen has been Composer-in-Residence with the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and is currently a faculty member of The Juilliard School.

We also heard a wonderfully lyrical new piano concerto by New Yorker Ed Green. A professor of composition at Manhattan School of Music who also serves on the faculty of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation in New York City, his *Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* is included in Volume 2 of the *VISIONS* series on a Tintangel CD (Canada), in performance by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra under Paul Freeman, and this performance will also be released as part of an Albany Records CD (USA) in 2002, on their *Twentieth Century Visions* series.

Among the orchestral triumphs of the Second Derriere Guard Festival of 1998 was a scintillating, exciting, rapid-fire concert overture by Robert Ian Winstin, an award-winning composer-conductor & pianist who hails from Chicago. He has written more than 200 works, including 5 symphonies, 2 piano concerti, a cello concerto, a violin concerto, and numerous chamber and solo instrumental works. His most recent work, "September 11th, 2001 - 9:05am" for solo trumpet and orchestra was used by several news networks in the days following the tragedy and will be included as the title work in an upcoming film. His music can be heard on several recordings on the E.R.M. label (also available at www.mp3.com/winstin).

The concert also offered music by Michael Dellaira, who performed as a solo guitarist and with several rock groups during the 1960's. Although he studied composition with the eminent serialist Milton Babbitt, Dellaira's music evinces his deep-seated love of American vernacular idioms, with beguiling turns of modal harmony and melody. His opera *Cheri* was recently showcased at Lincoln Center, and his new CD *FIVE* was released to acclaim on Albany Records (www.albanyrecords.com)

The Third Derriere Guard Festival of 1999 showcased the vocal music of San Franciscan Jake Heggie, whose opera *Dead Man Walking*, had a triumphant premiere and has also had several productions throughout the U.S. Hailed for his command of the singing voice, his communicative lyricism and his deeply felt emotionalism, Heggie has been championed by singers such as Frederica von Stade, Renee Fleming and Jennifer Larmore, amongst others; they can be heard on *The Faces of Love*, a gorgeous new disc issued by BMG Classics, with the composer at the piano.

The concert also featured chamber music by West Coast composer Nancy Bloomer Deussen who is well known throughout the San Francisco Bay Area as a composer, performer and arts impresario. Her beguiling music shows traces of Gershwin and early jazz, yet remains completely individual and always deeply heartfelt. Her work is available from Arizona University Recordings, North/South Records, ERM, Keynote Designs and BMS. Her most recent orchestral CD is *Reflections on the Hudson* (Arizona University Recordings, www.AURec.com).

And most recently, the 2001 Winter Salon of the Derriere Guard, added the talents of two other notable New York composers to this impressive list.

Ben Yarmolinsky is a classically trained composer with an interest in revitalizing the American musical theater tradition by combining contemporary language with classical musical forms. He has composed many musical theater pieces, including a "docu-opera" based on the Anita Hill hearings in the U.S. Senate (*Anita*), a sung television news broadcast (*Blind Witness News*) and a Letterman-inspired talk show (*The Lenny Paschen Show*). His most recent CD is *In Lieu of Flowers*, occasional songs written and performed by the composer.

Beth Anderson writes new romantic music, text-sound works, and musical theater. Her style is occasionally folksy, blues-inflected or minimalist in texture, always beautiful and with a sly sense of humor. Her most current CD is *September Swale* for mandolin and guitar (Antes/Bella Musica, on a disc CD 31.9153 entitled *Chilli Con Tango*).

Record Reviews

Dream On

DAVID CLEARY

Elliott Schwartz. *Dream Music: Chamber Works of Elliott Schwartz*. Capstone.

Elliott Schwartz's *Dream Music* (Capstone), consisting of small ensemble works by Elliott Schwartz, is a title that excellently characterizes its contents. Despite possessing sections that are full and outgoing, such as the early passages of *Dream Music with Variations* (a piano quartet) and parts of the finale to the violin/clarinet/piano trio *A Garden for RKB*, the music on this release exudes a crepuscular, other-worldly feel that imparts an appealing intimacy to the listening experience. But this is by no means flaccid stuff—undercurrents of energy are encountered in even the most subdued compositions, giving this predominantly quiet music a solid backbone.

With the exception of the piano solo *Four Maine Haiku*, these selections rival those of Ives in their all-pervasive reliance on borrowed material. Like this older composer, Schwartz skillfully interweaves pre-existing items into the music's fabric rather than pasting them on showcase style as often happens with folks such as George Crumb. And Schwartz's filching covers a wide spectrum of sources, ranging from Gershwin's *Preludes* to Verdi's *Otello* to Schumann's *Traumerei*. Yet the effect is not scattered sounding—somehow, these quotes are yoked together convincingly, sounding perfectly organic next to each other. And this holds equally true for the harmonic language employed; one never gets the impression that these triadic snippets sit awkwardly within Schwartz's more dissonant baseline sound ethos. His ability to simultaneously juggle such disparate concepts as free notation, minimalist elements, extended techniques, and pitch sets—as well as the aforementioned quotes—is both inimitable and masterful.

Equally impressive is the clever way in which formats are handled. The *Four Maine Haiku* mirror their literary counterparts by insisting on seventeen measure units for each movement. The resultant variety obtained despite such a rigid pre-compositional decision proves striking. Even the variation procedure found in the title track is not old-fashioned in feel. And more intuitive structures such as that encountered in the violin/piano duo *Memorial in Two Parts* come out sounding wonderfully right. In this instance, one can cite positively the use of cyclic technique to interrelate the work's two movements.

Performances, featuring the Copenhagen Contemporary Players, the trio Penumbra, violinist Adele Auriol, and pianists Schwartz and Bernard Fauchet, are excellent. With the exception of tinny piano sonics in *A Garden for RKB*, sound is very good. Production values are generally fine. This excellent release is strongly recommended.

Sellars is a Chooser

DAVID CLEARY

James Sellars. *Piano Works: Six Sonatas + One Sonatina*. CRI.

The piano sonatas of Hartford-based tonemeister James Sellars descend not from the multi-movement items most listeners associate with this genre, but rather the single-entity works of Liszt and Scarlatti. In particular, they demonstrate the type of flexible and personal structure found in the former's *B Minor Sonata*. Covering a nearly 30-year time span, they also trace this excellent composer's stylistic evolution from East Coast devotee to worldly eclectic.

Sonatas No. 1 (1973), *No. 2* (1981), and *No. 3* (1983-97) all employ a non-triadic harmonic language and exhibit a high seriousness of purpose. The earliest of these demonstrates an especially keen awareness of pointillism and other *de rigueur* matters of the era, but even here, Sellars refuses to toe any rigid line of mid-century severity. Decidedly more lyric passages peek out from the texture here with frequency—and permeate the following two sonatas in earnest. *Sonata No. 2* in fact opens with soft, lovely passages one might characterize as atonal Impressionism, culminating in dramatic, visceral material somewhat akin to Roger Sessions' essays in the genre; it is this critic's favorite of these earlier works. The last of this triumvirate, completed after a lengthy hiatus—and long after Sellars had abandoned this style—foreshadows the neoclassic earnestness of his later piano music, though its rather severe demeanor just misses imparting a certain stiffness to its manner of speech.

Humor and panache are decidedly not lacking in the more tonally oriented fourth (1987), fifth (1985), and sixth (1986) sonatas or the *Sonatina* (1988). The somewhat Stravinskian neoclassicism of the last two selections exude not a whiff of desiccation; for example, *Sonata No. 6* ("*Patterns on a Field*"), while stubbornly adhering to its march-like underpinnings, does so with a knowing wink, not a paucity of imagination. As one might guess from its subtitle ("*Sonata Brasileira*"), subtle South-of-the-Border influences perfume the fourth sonata, though they are liberally leavened with minimalist and 19th-century bravura figuration. Most impish of all is *Sonata No. 5* ("*Sonata Dada*"), which wildly vacillates from consonance to dissonance, often delighting in pushing pre-20th century gestures between the two harmonic extremes. Its intentionally abrupt unfolding and quicksilver texture shifts hang together surprisingly well in a long-range sense. Best of all, these works possess a stylish, vibrant sense of personality and a certain rare, indefinable ease of expression that is not simply fluid, but downright poetic. All are enormously appealing listens.

This terrific CD is an absolute must-hear.

Smaldone Scenes

DAVID CLEARY

Edward Smaldone. *Scenes from the Heartland*. CRI.

Edward Smaldone is a New York-based composer currently on the faculty at Queens College. The music heard on this release covers a 15-year timespan and shows a surprising and unusual evolution of style.

The earliest works here exhibit a fetching take on East Coast style dissonance. What helps make this music so fluidly charming is its easy embrace of gestures and formats from earlier periods. *Solo Sonata for Violin* (1980), for example, contains showy virtuosic writing that ultimately descends from J.S. Bach's solo fiddle classics, replete with double stops, left hand pizzicatos, and similar fare. And ternary form is encountered in the clarinet/violin/cello piece *Trio: Dance & Nocturne* (1984), though the recapitulation cleverly incorporates elements from both prior sections.

Smaldone's later music includes prominent jazz inflections and more blatant employment of older gestures while still retaining the earlier atonal verticals and traditional structures. The piano piece *Three Scenes from "The Heartland"* (1994) sports such things as Liszt style "thumb-melodies" surrounded by 19th-century manner of filigree and Bach type fugatos. Jazzy figures so pervade the *Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra* (1993) that the work in places suggests a clangorous version of Gershwin's famous essays for this combination. These, as well as *Two Sides of the Same Coin* (1990 -- a clarinet and piano duo) manage to delineate a certain personal take on Americana without resorting to Copland-style pandiatonicism. Your reviewer found these more recent works somewhat harder to fathom, their unusually broad ranging mixture of style traits from differing eras being a bit challenging to reconcile aesthetically. But one thing all the music on this CD has very much in its favor is a carefully considered, clearly expressed motivic tautness.

Performances here are excellent. Violinist Curtis Macomber, pianists Michael Boriskin and Donald Pirone, clarinetist Allen Blustine, cellist Andre Emelianoff, and the Munich Radio Orchestra (led by Arthur Fagen) do a splendid job. Sound and editing are fine as well. This often-intriguing release is worth a listen

Starer Strings

DAVID CLEARY

Robert Starer. *String Quartets No. 1-3*. CRI.

The late Robert Starer, Viennese-born but long resident in the United States (and formerly a faculty member at Juilliard, Brooklyn College, and the City University of New York), presents a solid trio of string quartets on this release. These span a surprising chronology, the first quartet being a youthful essay dating from his early 20s, the last two not composed until nearly fifty years later and within a year of each other.

All show a certain affinity for the harmonic language of Bartók and to a lesser extent Hindemith. In other words, these works utilize dissonant verticals (while occasionally admitting triadic sonorities) grounded within a relatively tonal large-scale underpinning. But Starer imparts his own distinctive stamp on the sound world here -- this does not sound like "warmed over" anything. The second quartet (1995) is the most neoclassic in structure, cleaving closely to a 19th-century oriented four-movement format: sonata-like opener, scherzo and trio, slow movement, and attention-grabbing finale. But rather than museum mustiness, one feels a sense of clean, urgent unfolding and mastery of material that is extremely compelling. Wide-eyed excitement and gleeful tweaking of the status quo pervades the tripartite first quartet (1947). As an example, Starer clearly enjoys peppering his otherwise *au courant* last movement with jazzy syncopations and walking bass pizzicatos. Perhaps the best of all these pieces, *Quartet No. 3* (1996) demonstrates a remarkably tight handling of motivic configuration; in that sense, it stands in relation to the rest of his quartet oeuvre as Bartók's taut fourth quartet does to his cornerstone set of six. And Starer's layout here is highly imaginative; this single movement entry divides into seven distinct sections (none of which obviously correspond to traditional schemas) while expertly delineating a cogent large-scale sense of balance. This masterful piece stands proudly next to the best examples of literature.

The Miami String Quartet, for whom the composer wrote his second and third quartets, performs excellently. Fine ensemble blend, natty finger technique, and carefully considered pacing are the order of the day. Sound and editing are good. This fine disc is strongly recommended.

Bow to the Metal

DAVID CLEARY

Peter Warren and Matt Samolis. *Bowed Metal Music*. Innova

Peter Warren and Matt Samolis have been active in Boston's underground experimental music and sound art scene for a number of years now, having among other things founded various improvisation based collectives such as Cheap Suit, Elastic Consort, and Gaduri. Their most recent instrument of choice is the steel cello, a sizeable collection of cymbals and pitched steel rods played with large modified bows. It puts forth a distinctively eerie metallic roaring sound loaded with complex overtone combinations; a layman might for lack of a better word call it "space" music

The hour-long entity on this CD is improvised, recorded in one live take and presented without editing. Weighty, ritualistic, almost foreboding in feel at times, the music consists of slowly unfolding drone-like textures. But it all proves surprisingly listenable; what lends distinction here are the startling variety of pitch, dynamics, and textures obtained and good sense of overall direction and pacing; the music clumps itself into perceivable sections that play off each other well. Warren and Samolis respond to each other's extemporizing with sensitivity and intelligence, adding small but telling touches that lend shaping and refinement to what might otherwise be comparatively undifferentiated blocks of sound.

Sound quality is very good; liner notes and bios are succinct yet informative. This release is recommended to all, and an absolute must for devotees of serious ambient music.

Chronicle

December 1

San Francisco Symphony in Charles Coleman's *Streetscape* and Béla Bartók's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

December 4

New York Philharmonic in Ives's *The Unanswered Question* and Béla Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

Composer Portraits: Jeffrey Mumford. Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Robin Holloway's *Viola Concerto* performed by the San Francisco Symphony. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

December 6

69th birthday of Henryk Górecki.

82nd birthday of Dave Brubeck.

Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Goat Hall, San Francisco, CA. Through December 15.

SF Conservatory presents *Strings at the Shrine*. National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, San Francisco, CA.

December 9

New York New Music Ensemble in Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Pierre Boulez's *Sonatine for Lute and Piano*, Gerard Grisey's *Charme*, and Philippe Leroux's *Continuo(ns)*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

December 10

89th anniversary of the birth of Morton Gould.

December 11

94th birthday of Elliott Carter.

December 14

Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* performed by the San Francisco Symphony. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

Orchestra 2001 in Alfred Schnittke's *Concerto Grosso No. 3* and Béla Bartók's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

December 15

Benjamin Britten's *Carol* and Francis Poulenc's *Christmas Motets* performed by the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

December 16

70th birthday of Rodion Shchedrin

December 19

Rodion Shchedrin's *The Enchanted Wanderer* premiered by the New York Philharmonic. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY.

December 26

76th anniversary of the birth of Earle Brown.

December 28

106th anniversary of the birth of Roger Sessions.

December 30

98th anniversary of the birth of Dmitri Kabalevsky.

Comment

The Derriere Guard

STEFANIA DE KENESSEY

I can no longer recall precisely whether it was late in the fall of 1995 or early in the spring of 1996 that I coined the term “Derriere Guard,” but I remember the occasion with crystal clarity. Sometime during that academic year, I traveled to Bennington College, at the request of its new president, to give informal advice and to help with interviewing two fellow composers who were being considered for faculty appointments. During the long drive back from New England, I had plenty of time to reflect on my dissatisfaction with the course music had taken in the 20th century: during the last hundred years, it had shed -- very deliberately -- all the features that I value in music of the past. Music was once a thing of beauty, of emotional communication, of passionate humanity. In our era, it had become something else altogether.

In fact, there is a simple parlor game I like to play to illustrate this profound and radical shift. Open up a dictionary—any dictionary—published prior to the advent of modernism and look up the definition of music. My old, well-thumbed Concise Oxford Dictionary, originally printed in 1911, characterizes music as the “art of combining sounds with a view to beauty of form and expression of emotion.” Now do likewise with a dictionary published after the 1930s or so, and you will see a staggering difference. The version offered by my 1974 Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, for example, posits music as “the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationship....” Need one say more?

The great composers of the age, when they spoke about such matters at all—which was, admittedly, infrequently—seemed to agree. We all know that Schoenberg proudly declared his “emancipation of the dissonance,” raising it from second-class status (as had been the practice of all composers in the past) to its present position of superiority. But even Stravinsky, in his autobiography of 1936, concurs with the world-view of music as nothing more than ordered sound:

I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc. Expression has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence. If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something at all, this is only an illusion and not a reality. It is simply an additional attribute which, by tacit and inveterate agreement, we have lent it, thrust upon it, as a label, a convention—in short, an aspect unconsciously or by force of habit, we have come to confuse with its essential being.... The phenomenon of music is given to us with the sole purpose of establishing an order in things, including, and particularly, the coordination between man and time. To be put into practice, its indispensable and single requirement is construction. Construction once completed, this order has been attained and there is nothing more to be said.

Until the opening of the 20th century, Western music had offered, at its best, a near perfect blend of emotion and intellect, with the heart and the mind governing and assisting each other. With the onset of modernism, that balance was jettisoned in favor of a carefully calculated rationalism. Can beauty, after all, be proven to exist, with absolute certainty, beyond the shadow of a doubt? The answer of our age, sadly, has been (in the arts as in philosophy) that we cannot know beauty to exist -- ergo, beauty does not, in fact, exist. The pure rationalism that provided the background for the spectacular success of all the sciences -- from astronomy to medicine -- became the undoing of the arts. Because the arts are the traditional repositories of values that may be ultimately ungraspable, but without which human life is also unimaginable: beauty, truth and love.

Lest I sound too pessimistic, let me admit something. At the outset, the 20th century held enormous appeal because it offered limitless experimentation, calling into question accepted truths and searching out fresh answers. Indeed, the liveliness of the time is almost palpable: one has only to read the correspondence of young artists working in Paris or Berlin at the turn of the century to appreciate their excitement, to feel their exuberant spirit, to empathize with their idealism as they demolished the decadent old world and set out to refashion it along different, better lines.

However, there was a price to pay for the constant, relentless experimentation: after all, the avant-garde can only be fighting at the forefront when there is a battle being waged. As the century wore on, modernism eventually won the day; it was fully embraced by powerful institutions, from museums to symphony orchestras. Ideas that had once been revolutionary -- abstract painting, fractured architecture, free-form poetry and dissonant music -- lost their edge and slowly but inexorably became the mainstream. Hence the delicious paradox: by the second half of the twentieth century, the avant-garde had, in fact, become the status quo. All the chest thumping I was hearing endlessly about "pushing the envelope" was no more than hollow rhetoric: the envelope had been pushed so far that there was nothing left of it. Music was, after all, just organized sound. But wait, they even went one step further. As John Cage (like Andy Warhol, a brilliant theorist) explained, music did not necessarily have to be organized; it could be completely random, aleatoric, any sound, anything at all.

For composers such as myself, the end of the twentieth century is a historic juncture where only one "radical" act finally remains: to return to the past -- selectively, imaginatively, but decisively. Nothing can be more provocative right now than to return to long-forgotten, long-abandoned ideas rooted in the distant past. To rediscover and to reinvent historic forms and techniques -- this is truly cutting edge.

Unfortunately, the problems of our age can seem insurmountable. After all, I am a composer who continues to use key signatures; my music is tuneful, harmonious, rhythmically engaging, in traditional genres and in recognizable forms. It does not ape the past: for example, it relies on modes (familiar from non-Western music, American popular idioms, and Western music itself prior to 1500) rather than the major/minor scales (even more familiar from the Baroque through Romantic eras). But it partakes of the past in its insistence on beauty, on the passionate communication of uplifting emotions.

There was only one, tiny ray of light: I knew that the afflictions of music were not particular to my field, that the damage of modernism could be felt in all the other arts. What if we were to band together? Is there not strength in numbers? What if we could show the world that there is a fresh and viable alternative to both modernism and to post-modernism? That music can still be melodious, that painting and sculpture can celebrate the human form, that buildings can achieve symmetry and grace, that poetry can tell a story in metered rhyme? How could we gather together? What would we call ourselves? The situation is complicated—how to fit it into a simple phrase?

I organized the First Derriere Guard Festival of 1997 at The Kitchen in New York; it featured author and cultural critic Tom Wolfe as the keynote speaker and was devoted to the music and poetry of the East Coast. Spanning a four-day period, the festival included a gallery exhibit of contemporary figurative painting and sculpture, curated by Barbara Krulik, as well as renderings of neoclassical architecture, curated by Richard Sammons and Anne Fairfax; a concert of orchestral music, performed by the Absolute Ensemble under the baton of Kristjan Jarvi; poetry readings selected by Dana Gioia and dramatized by renowned actors; an address by poet and philosopher Frederick Turner; a roundtable discussion moderated by classics professor Daniel Selden; a recital of chamber music by the dynamic Ahn Trio.

The festival -- with no advertising -- sold out virtually every event and was such a success that I decided to take the show on the road. I modeled the subsequent regional gatherings on the original format but used local artists, poets and musicians in order to demonstrate the universal or historic nature of our movement. The Second Derriere Guard Festival of 1998 at the Graham Foundation in Chicago emphasized work from the Midwest, while the Third Derriere Guard Festival of 1999 at San Francisco's SomArts Gallery and Theater focused mainly on artists, poets and musicians on the West Coast, from San Diego to Seattle.

This season, I have brought the Derriere Guard back to New York City, albeit with a slightly different aim. The success of the past three festivals proves that there is a large public that is eager to encounter contemporary traditionalist work. However, the cognoscenti who control access to such audiences are not yet ready: in intellectual and critical circles, the concept of a progressive neoclassicism is still not understood or seen as a viable alternative.

In the hopes of creating a fresh atmosphere of dialogue, I have launched a series of private, by-invitation Derriere Guard salons. As before, each event will involve a variety of art forms, from painting and architecture to poetry and music, but each gathering will also have a particular focus. The inaugural Winter Salon of Dec.7-8, 2001 showcased architecture, with a large group of architectural renderings curated by the firm of Fairfax & Sammons. The exhibit of paintings by Jacob Collins displayed landscapes with architectural elements; the series of poetry readings organized by Frederick Turner paid tribute to the destruction of Sept.11th; the lectures by Richard John and Catesby Leigh outlined the problems and successes of monumental architecture in the contemporary world; the concert curated by composer Michael Dellaira featured song cycles exploring our sense of place.

Again, the salon was a success beyond my wildest expectations: each event was oversubscribed, and large numbers of potential audience members had to be wait-listed and finally turned away. The atmosphere was charged, energetic and dynamic. As a friend explained to me, his normal relationship with the arts is that of a consumer: he buys a ticket, attends a particular event, then returns home and goes to sleep. Here, he was able to move beyond that, to sample a wide range of genres, to debate aesthetic issues, to speak with the artists directly about their work. It was a true salon. The Derriere Guard gatherings will continue, albeit their frequency will depend on the money available to support them. The next event, with a focus on contemporary traditionalist painting, is being planned for mid-September, 2002.

The Music of the Derriere Guard

STEFANIA DE KENESSEY

Ask most people who have fallen into the habit of listening *actively* to music – rather than passively, merely as the background accompaniment to their other activities – and they will reveal something astounding: the vast majority of their selections were written between 1500 and 1900. Only occasionally will a name familiar from the twentieth century crop up – but then it will be early Stravinsky, late Bartók, balletic Prokofiev or operatic Britten: all tonalists (at least at that stage of their long and eminent careers).

Simply put, musical modernism has been a failure: in spite of determined attempts by established musical institutions, by intellectuals and by critics, the newly configured aesthetic – music as organized, structured sound – did not take hold among the listening public.

Nor did it take a firm hold among all composers, although the holdouts constituted a minority. Alas, a slim minority.

But there has been a noticeable comeback in the U.S., and it is gaining momentum amongst the younger generation. Increasingly, composers are beginning to tinker with the old-fashioned concepts of melody (horror!), triadic harmony (even greater horror!) and classical forms (unspeakable horrors!).

Through the festivals of The Derriere Guard, which I launched in 1997, I have tried to present composers who work in this neo-traditionalist, neo-classical vein. Although their music varies greatly, they share some traits:

- (1) They insist on creating beautiful melodies;
- (2) Their basic musical language is tonal;
- (3) Their harmonies are (often) consonant;
- (4) They counterpoint shows craft and linear development;
- (5) Their structures grow out of classical forms;
- (6) Their idiom is more than a parodistic, eclectic juxtaposition of borrowed styles.

In other words, these composers are all reaching for a new synthesis of old and new, for a revitalization of tradition which both acknowledges the values of the past – but is unafraid to move ahead.

Writers

DAVID CLEARY's music has been played throughout the U.S. and abroad, including performances at Tanglewood and by Alea II and Dinosaur Annex. A member of Composers in Red Sneaker, he has won many awards and grants, including the Harvey Gaul Contest, an Ella Lyman Cabot Trust Grant, and a MacDowell residence. He is a staff critic for The New Music Connoisseur and 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC. His article on composing careers is published by Gale Research and he has contributed CD reviews to the latest *All Music Guide to Rock*. His music appears on the Centaur and Vienna Modern Masters labels, and his bio may be found in many *Who's Who* books.

STEFANIA DE KENESSEY is a leading figure in the revival of neoclassical contemporary music and the founder of The Derriere Guard, an association of traditionalist artists, architects, poets, and musicians. Her music is performed regularly throughout the country as well as abroad, and her recent chamber music CD *Shades of Light, Shades of Dark* (North/South Records) received rave reviews in *Fanfare Magazine* as “fully worthy to share a program or disc with the masterpieces by Mozart or Brahms.”

RALPH LORENZ teaches at Kent State and writes for 21ST-CENTURY MUSIC.