Observations on Music, Culture, and Politics

Daniel Asia

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TO CAROLEE ASIA
FOR HER
LOVE, GOOD SPIRITEDNESS,
AND PATIENCE.

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PREFACE

This book is a bit of a surprise, or at least it is to me. It came about in a rather unintended fashion. I had been giving a talk around the country, "Breath In a Ram's Horn: The Jewish Spirit in Classical Music." One of my daughter's best friends was dating a young editor at the *Huffington Post* (*HP*). He and I met for the fun of it, and he took a liking to the idea of my writing up that presentation as a feature for *HP*, with the subtitle "Why Classical Music is like Jewish Prayer." I did so, and he published it around the time of the Jewish High Holy Days.

The *HP* editor mentioned to me sometime thereafter that since I had been published I could now post other materials. I did not give it much thought. A few months or so later, I attended a colleague's concert including Cage's well-known work *Sonatas and Interludes*. Soon thereafter, I wrote "The Put On of the Century, or the Cage Centenary" and posted it. Little did I know I was whacking a hornets' nest, as those hornets came after me with a vengeance. This resulted in my continuing to take up my pen (okay, keyboard) to ward off these attacks and to make the case for why the compositional world was not in a good place and needed to re-orient itself.

My succeeding articles were therefore mostly negative, taking various composers or trends to task. A number of years later a close colleague remarked to me "I like your articles, but they are generally negative, and it is pretty easy just bashing people. Why don't you let people know what you like." The result was my series of writings with the title "Music I (Mostly) hold Dear." You might ask why the "Mostly." Occasionally I allowed myself to still go a bit negative. As a composer, I cannot give any of my contemporaries, predecessors, or even myself a completely free pass. If the insights and viewpoints I have garnered over my long career are to mean anything to anybody, then I need to be completely honest, even when that means being critical.

When giving presentations I sometimes mention my various goals. These include writing the best music I can, which will hopefully bring joy and transcendence into people's lives; to help American culture and ideas survive; and to help the Jewish people and their mission to thrive. The materials in this book reflect these priorities. Underlying these ambitions—

and the music I have written that effects the opinions I bring to my work—is a dedication to beauty, beautiful ideas, and the elevating affect it can have on the soul.

Other essays are more broadly polemical about the state of classical music, the arts, and culture. These are reflective of how they are now presented in the culture-at-large and in the academy. And finally, I follow-up my very first article with others relating to Jewish concerns.

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I am grateful to *Academic Questions*, *The New Criterion*, and the *Huffington Post* for publishing my work and those who made this happen, including Stephen Balch, Peter Wood, Carol Iannone, Roger Kimball, and Joshua Fleet.

I thank my many fine teachers who prepared me for my compositional, conductorial, and intellectual journey. They include: Peter Seibert, Jerome Gray, Randall McClellan, Iva Dee Hiatt, James McElwaine, Ron Perera, Stephen Albert, Valerie Pilcher, Neil Stillings, Jacob Druckman, Arthur Weisberg, Bruce MacCombie, and Richard Siegel.

My parents unwittingly guided me in my endeavors as composer and writer. My father, Benjamin Asia, was a child prodigy on the piano who ended up turning to the law after his father died and the Depression hit. He instilled his joy in music through endless practicing of *Coney Island Washboard;* I played the trombone and he the piano. My mother, Hilda Aronson Asia, was the daughter of Roslyn, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who became—but of course!—an English teacher. As a result, my mother enforced a strict attention to language and grammar which I hope has paid off in my writing. She too was a lawyer, so conversations around the kitchen table with the two of them required well-reasoned and well-spoken arguments.

My wife Carolee Asia—a gifted artist—and I have lived a wonderful life imbued with what we early on designated “creative tension.” This involved our work, the raising of our three children—Shoshana, Reuben, and Eve—and early on at least, the peripatetic existence of a composer that involved various moves almost always with a new child in tow. For her love, good spiritedness, and patience, I am grateful.

FOREWORD

WHY HIGH CULTURE MATTERS

JAY NORDLINGER

Daniel Asia is a composer and teacher of classical music. Those are very good things to be. He is also a spokesman for classical music—another very good thing to be. He *defends* music, *champions* music, *evangelizes* for music. All highly important.

"Classical music has taken a big cultural hit in America since the late sixties," he writes. Yes, it has. Classical musicians used to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine, as many of us note. Toscanini appeared on the cover three times! Beecham, Szell, and Solti appeared there as well. So did Flagstad, Tebaldi, and a slew of other opera stars.

Opera stars were seen, and heard, on *The Tonight Show*, too. Johnny Carson was evidently keen on them. He had big names, like Pavarotti. But he also had Judith Blegen and Martina Arroyo. Beverly Sills not only appeared on his show, she guest-hosted for him. Johnny had instrumentalists as guests, too: the violinist Eugene Fodor, for example, and the pianist Byron Janis.

"Now they won't let us talk," Renée Fleming said to me, about ten years ago. What did she mean? The great soprano meant that classical musicians—chiefly singers—are still invited to appear on talk shows, occasionally. And they get to sing or play. But not sit down and talk to the host, as before.

The decline and fall of classical music is an old theme, one that I have often made sport of. "The death of classical music," said Charles Rosen, the late pianist-scholar, "is perhaps the oldest tradition of classical music." Yet there is legitimate cause for concern.

Research shows that the leading factor in whether a person attends classical concerts or operas is: did the person study an instrument as a child?

Did he actually touch an instrument with his hands? The composer Thea Musgrave pointed out to me that people are able to consume reams of music these days—via YouTube, for example (that gift from heaven). But such consumption is basically a passive activity. There is no substitute for making music yourself.

Music education in America is way, way down, I'm given to understand. Asia has a front-row seat (much as one would want to avert one's eyes). "Students come to university never having heard of Bach or Beethoven," he writes, adding, "I kid you not."

He tells us that "the professional class of previous generations" knew classical music, thanks to "the playing of an instrument." They had musical training—however modest—from grade school through college. They also had exposure to music by attending concerts, and plays that featured music. "Essentially, this has been lost," writes Asia.

Yes, but speaking of Asia: there is a great appetite for classical music in China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and so on. Western conservatories are stuffed with students from East Asia. When I asked Lorin Maazel, the late conductor, about the future of classical music, the first words out of his mouth were, "Thank God for China."

As you may have gathered, I have interviewed a fair amount of musicians over the years, and you'll forgive me if I quote them. In 2002, I spoke with Ned Rorem, the American composer, who was lamenting the status of his class, i.e., contemporary composers of classical music: "We are living in the only period in history in which music of the past is stressed at the expense of music of the present."

Asia has written about the "professional class." How about the intellectuals? Rorem said that they know about visual art, past and present; they know about literature, past and present. But if they know any music at all, it's pop music. "I and my brothers and sisters are not part of their ken," he said.

How about the general public? The public "has no notion of what it is we composers do," said Rorem. Performers are more important than composers—a lot more important—in the eyes of the world. "We're a despised minority," said Rorem. "Actually, we're not even that, because we don't even exist, and to be despised, you have to exist."

I assure the reader that Asia is less gloomy. He is generally a happy warrior, or at least a determined, feisty one. But surely he knows what Rorem is talking about.

Something in this book made me think of my own experience. Asia writes, "Most universities have historically supported great performances of Western art music on campus as part of their educational mission for their students as well as the surrounding community."

I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the home of the University of Michigan—and a small capital of the arts. This was in the 1970s and '80s. There were as many concerts as sports events. I thought this was normal. Getting out and about in the world, I saw that this was abnormal—and I knew that I was very lucky.

In his collection, Asia talks of various issues in music, including political correctness. Does PC exist in classical music? Oh, my heavens, yes. Twenty years ago, the late composer Patrick Kavanaugh made an amusing remark to me. It went something like this: "If you want to get attention or funding for your music, just throw in some gamelan."

The gamelan is a musical tradition from Indonesia. It is a fine tradition, I'm sure. But it was comically trendy in the West for a long while. I'm not sure how it stands today.

Composers, writes Asia, like to "regale us" with messages concerning poverty, sexual liberation, war, the rights of workers, environmentalism, and so on. For a time, I was hearing a lot of "environmental" pieces. A shameless punner, I nicknamed this genre of music "the greenpiece."

I think of Krzysztof Penderecki, the late Polish composer, who said, "I don't write political music. Political music is immediately obsolete."

One of the many things I admire about Asia is that he is not afraid to express an opinion—to plant his flag, whether you or I would plant it there or not. He is not vague. In Dan's view, Stravinsky and Schoenberg are "certainly the two most important composers of the twentieth century." *Certainly*. I appreciate this lack of shyness.

He says what a great many people think but fear to say—about Pierre Boulez, for example. That composer was supremely honored in his time. He was no doubt brainy as hell. Will his music be honored by posterity? I would

not bet the ranch, and neither would Asia. Fashions come and go, whether in *couture* or in music.

Asia quotes Boulez as saying that, if you don't compose twelve-tone music, your music is "irrelevant" to the "needs" of your "epoch." You will pardon me if I do some more quoting, from interviews I have conducted.

Lee Hoiby, the late American composer, said, "I felt the hot breath of the composition police on my neck every time I wrote a major third."

Elliott Carter, another American composer, was very, very different from Hoiby: he was an exemplar of modernism. (He was also one of the most intelligent people I have ever been around.) Asked what he thought about the "neo-Romantics" such as Samuel Barber, he said, "Well, some of us felt that the kind of music Sam wrote had already been done, only done better than anybody could do it now. Therefore there was no reason to do it now." With a grin, Carter added, "What Sam did was deplorable," but the music, nevertheless, "is rather good."

I should say. And don't forget the words of Duke Ellington: "If it sounds good, it *is* good."

How about John Cage? A lot of us think he has no clothes, clever as he may be. Asia points to him like the boy pointing to the emperor. There are many, many people who privately agree with Asia—but only privately.

They also agree with him when he writes this: "For the most part, pop music is bad stuff. Its tunes are anodyne, freeze-dried, lacking any substance. Its rhythm is base and never changing. The music starts nowhere and goes nowhere . . . "

Let me not leave the impression that Asia is a mere naysayer or a crab. No, he is a wonderful booster. Reading him, I've been reminded of my old fondness for Robert Beaser, an American composer born in 1954. I intend to listen to him again. Also, Asia sent me off to listen to a violin concerto by Stephen Jaffe, and to the music in general of Stephen Albert. Those are two Stephens with whom I had not been acquainted.

I will return to that crack by Charles Rosen: "The death of classical music is perhaps the oldest tradition of classical music." I believe that classical music will go on and on. I believe that it is unkillable, same as beauty, soul, and intelligence are unkillable. But classical music will always, always be a minority taste.

Permit me to quote a crack of my own: “There’s a reason they call it ‘pop’ music, you know: It’s popular.” Classical music is not *supposed* to be popular.

But it should be loved and nurtured by a minority. Composed, played, sung, conducted, and listened to by a minority. How healthy is that minority? How healthy is it in the United States, which has been a major home to classical music for about a hundred years? The minority needs boosting. And no one can say that Daniel Asia—talented, irrepressible, and invaluable—is not doing his part.

PART ONE

THE IDEA OF HIGH CULTURE

PART ONE: CHAPTER 1

DIMINUENDO: CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THE ACADEMY

How is the tradition of Western classical music faring on our university campuses? Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand what has transpired with classical music in the wider culture, as the relationship between the two is so strong.

Classical music has taken a big cultural hit in America since the late sixties. In the seventies and eighties serious reviews and articles on classical music still appeared in major mass-market magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. Its presence on television, a frequent occurrence in the sixties, was already gone. Today the occasional article on classical music appears in the *New Yorker*, not exactly a mass-market rag. Reviewers in regional newspapers have mostly been let go, or their beat handed over to someone completely without training in classical music, such as the restaurant or country-western music reviewer. Online reviews haven't taken on this terrain much, and the intellectual journals that should cover classical music have, of late, fallen down on the task as well.

Commentary magazine, which has a long and rich history of publishing music reviews, most recently under the formidable Terry Teachout, has retreated to including a general category of culture (whether highbrow, middle, or lowbrow not being particularly clear), with film, for example, apparently being treated on the same level as classical music, as is Broadway, pop, and jazz (please, no gasps—I will explain shortly). *The New Criterion*, with the fine ear and pen of Jay Nordlinger, reviews concerts in New York City, albeit mostly programs of standard repertory music. Occasionally, Nordlinger's reviews also appear in the *National Review*. Book reviews, which by definition examine new books, simply no longer have an analogue in serious music. The result is that classical music, and particularly new classical music, has been marginalized, if not excised, from the cultural landscape.

I have of course left out the paper of record, the *New York Times*. It does indeed continue to review concerts of classical and new classical music. Having said this, it reviews the latest pop, Indie, country-western, and rap concerts as well. Thus, its actual reportage of serious music has been drastically reduced from just twenty-five years ago. This began under the guidance of John Rockwell, whose prevailing doctrine was that high and low no longer exist as useful categories, and therefore all styles of music are essentially equal and should be treated as such. In *All-American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (Knopf, 1983), Rockwell includes chapters not only on Elliott Carter and Ralph Shapey, but also on such pop luminaries as David Byrne and Laurie Anderson. Now, being a child of the sixties, sure I love the Beatles, Miles, and other pop and jazz greats. But to compare their output, in terms of quantity, quality, and emotional breadth, to the greats of classical music—Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Copland, and Stravinsky, to name just a few—is neither realistic nor intellectually honest.

It is also true that to enjoy classical music requires a modicum of literacy and, as in any area of intellectual endeavor, the more the better. Classical music is, after all, about ideas expressed in sound. The professional class of previous generations knew this music, through the playing of an instrument, with musical training throughout school (from grade school through college), and from the regular attendance of concerts and plays that featured music. Essentially, this has been lost. Attendance at these intellectually vibrant activities has been replaced by attendance at sports events and film, experienced live or more often viewed on television, computer, or iPod. While they are enjoyable and offer the illusion of active participation in a familiar group experience, sports and movies are driven by mass-market considerations—and represent formulaic entertainment for kids, and adults who still wish to be kids. This is lots of fun, but almost never art.

To take a view from the late eighties that applies to the present, consider the section on music in Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.

When reading his comments at the time of the book's publication I thought Bloom overstated the case. After a recent rereading, I now fear his comments are a radical understatement.

Bloom suggests that music is now indeed central to the culture of university students, but it is rock, not classical music, that occupies this position. Classical music has become a "special taste," and "no classical

music has been produced that can speak to this generation."[1] He refers to Plato, for whom "Music is the medium of the *human* soul in its most ecstatic condition of wonder and terror" (italics in original). Music "always involves a delicate balance between passion and reason," and Bloom suggests that "the history of music is a series of attempts to give form and beauty to the dark, chaotic, premonitory forces in the soul—to make them serve a higher purpose."

Bloom of course does not find this with rock music, whose themes, he suggests, are "sex, hate, and a smarmy, hypocritical version of brotherly love." In this Bloom is talking about what he knows best, the lyrics. But his major concern is rock music's effect on education, where he believes it "ruins the imagination of young people and makes it very difficult for them to have a passionate relationship to the art and thought that are the substance of liberal education." He concludes: "Rock music encourages passions and provides models that have no relation to any life the young people who go to universities can possibly lead, or to the kinds of admiration encouraged by liberal studies. Without the cooperation of the sentiments, anything other than technical education is a dead letter." I fear this has become even more descriptive of our situation at the end of the first decade of the new millennium.

To understand why this is so from a musical standpoint, let us now consider the different natures of classical, serious, or concert music as opposed to pop, jazz, or even non-Western musical forms. What is it that differentiates these musical forms, and why should anyone be more . . . ahem . . . "privileged" than another? We must begin with the question of history. Western music initiated with the ancient Hebrews, Christians, and Greeks; therefore, the history of Western music reaches back at least a few thousand years. Its history as an art, or an endeavor seeking transcendence in a sophisticated written musical system, goes back about a thousand years. Thus, in the West we are able to trace our historical understanding of sound back a very long time, from monody to organum and through a trajectory of counterpoint and harmony that has no other equivalent in the world's music. Now, we can add tremendously to the arsenal of Western music through the study and incorporation of aspects of other musical styles, which Western composers have indeed done (as have those in other spheres of inquiry), but the resultant music of the West remains unique in many respects. We

[1]Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*: *How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 69, 70.

dismiss its tremendous depth and rigor at our peril. Even in the work of contemporary luminaries such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass, who are known for incorporating aspects of the music of Africa and India, respectively, the use of harmony and counterpoint is a purely Western phenomenon, and their music could not exist outside of a Western context.

Pop music, from a purely musical standpoint, is too simplistic to be given much intellectual consideration. It traffics in the most banal of ideas. Where Western classical music offers sophistication of architecture, pop gives us the three-minute song and/or endless, mindless repetition, and thus evinces an inability to advance any kind of complex scenario or argument. Like film, pop relies on formula and production values. Its history is just sixty years old, perhaps a little longer if we include certain historical antecedents. Finally, as Bloom mentioned, its emotional depth, in terms of both music and lyrics, rarely rises above the infantile. However, pop music is clearly pervasive and ubiquitous in society; it continues to dominate the scene and the psyche of our students. (At the 2009 Kennedy Center Awards for the Arts, for example, Bruce Springsteen was the major draw for the press, not Dave Brubeck, the token opera singer, or the other celebrities.)

The history of jazz extends back a bit farther, into the latter part of the nineteenth century. But it too travels the realm of relatively simple forms, with the typical statement of the head, or tune, followed by improvisation among the members of the ensemble, and finishing with a restatement of the tune. The architectural range of jazz, therefore, is limited. And its emotional range, while certainly wider than that of pop, doesn't come close to the breadth and depth of classical music.

The serious introduction into the West of world music began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, via the budding field of anthropology, which grew into the discipline of ethnomusicology. In the middle of the twentieth century this primarily included the study of high art music of different cultures—Indonesia, India, and perhaps the court music of Japan being the primary interests of study. These musical traditions have the admirable qualities of longevity, sophistication of form, and theoretical and intellectual depth. At the same time, they have remained relatively static throughout their histories, certainly in comparison with Western art music. They also are, quite obviously, not ours, and thus do not speak to our particular experience of the world.

Ethnomusicology has since branched out to include folk and popular music of all sorts. The power or importance as art of these musical styles is

much less significant than their cultural influence and position, which explains the antipathy between high art Western music practitioners and ethnomusicologists.

Given this cultural backdrop, what can we say about music in the Academy, defined here as institutions of higher learning such as state and private universities and colleges? I will speak of conservatories such as Juilliard, Curtis, and Eastman in a separate context, as their mission is somewhat different. The music major—one who is studying an instrument, musicology, or composition—is of course quite different from the English, math, or history major. So we will look at these different subpopulations for their differences and commonalities.

What do all students share in their experience of music, and of classical Western music in particular? First and foremost is the pervasiveness of popular music. Like almost everyone today, students cannot exist in any environment without encountering popular music. It is piped into all malls, restaurants, coffee houses, doctors' offices, health facilities, office buildings, vehicles, and of course, directly into our heads by iPods. There is hardly a second in the day when students are not hearing some form of music, unless of course, they are texting on their cell phones. Whereas in previous generations students moved from relative quiet into a musical sphere, they now inhabit or are surrounded by music of some sort most of their waking moments. Whereas in previous generations one had to seek out music, by playing an instrument or attending a performance, one now has to seek out, and occasionally demand, silence.

The result is that the ability to register and engage with musical ideas has been reduced. All students today must be taught how to listen. And because they are also easily distracted, they must be taught how to focus and to concentrate as well, and for spans of time to which they are unaccustomed.

Since they are most familiar with pop songs of a very short duration, anything much longer tends to create confusion, discomfort, and eventually outright fatigue. But we also encounter that Bloomian problem of actual emotional and spiritual engagement. This generation hardly knows how to think, but it certainly doesn't know how to feel. There is a stark disconnect of the emotional from the intellectual, and today's students have trouble engaging their senses, feelings, and intellect in any unified manner. They literally don't know what or how to feel, and have trouble distinguishing the real from the counterfeit in this regard.

Music majors will know some of the music of their own instrument, but they will have rarely encountered much other musical literature. They will know the names of some of the major composers of the past, and rarely any of the past fifty years or so. It is highly unlikely that non-music majors will have ever heard a Bach partita, a Beethoven symphony, or a Stravinsky ballet. If asked to name a living composer, or even one from the past hundred years, these students will most likely mention John Williams rather than Aaron Copland or Charles Ives or John Adams. Non-music majors share an acquaintance with the towering figures of film music in common with many budding composition majors, who have an interest in and a desire to make a career in film music, but know little of the classical musical tradition, particularly that of the recent past.

The distinction between music written for the business sphere and art music is not really something they fathom. John Williams is a talented man, but his primary skills lie in writing music quickly, music that is a pastiche of other composers' styles, is catchy, and is emotively appropriate for the image it accompanies. It lacks the one and most important quality of art music— that of a singular voice of moment and urgency with something important to say. Again, this generation has real trouble differentiating the real from the market image, technical skill from content, and thus surface from true and deep meaning.

This is to say that the general level of ignorance of all students today is rather deep. The situation may be slightly different at top-tier private institutions as opposed to public ones, but the pervasive cultural stew makes for a greater similarity than difference. Music majors will eventually fill the largest gaps in their knowledge while taking the usual required music history and theory courses. They will do this in a rather desultory fashion, as they are not usually as truly interested in becoming more well-rounded musicians as they are in honing their technical capabilities on their instrument of choice. They wish to become adept specialists, which is something the university, and their teachers, encourage. The active engagement and expansion of the mind is less sought after than the athletic aspects of musical virtuosity. That most of these students will never achieve virtuoso status, or be professionally employed for that matter, is rarely spoken of, since it involves real introspection that would pose too much of a threat to the prevailing system. The music major will take a course in the business of music as well, a somewhat new arrival in the last decade and a half or so. This course covers such tasks as marketing, grant writing, advertising and promotion, letter writing, and creation of curricula vitae. It has little to do with music, and is suspect in that it takes away time that

students could actually be spending learning more about the richness of the music they are studying.

The non-music major is now presented with a cornucopia of possibilities. Along with the traditional music appreciation offerings, courses on the history of rock and roll and of jazz are ubiquitous and well subscribed. Ensemble experiences have expanded from choir, jazz, band, and orchestra to include steel band and any number of world music ensembles, including Mariachi, Ghanese drumming, Gamelan, etc. All of these options are presented in a value-free framework, of course. Thus, it is now quite possible, and in fact more than likely, that the typical non-major will never experience the legacy of Western music during college, let alone be taught how to absorb its complexities and transcendent mysteries.

Another aspect of musical life in the Academy that has changed dramatically for the worse is in the realm of artistic presentation. Most universities have historically supported great performances of Western art music on campus as part of their educational mission for their students as well as the surrounding community. This usually meant that under the guidance of faculty and other interested parties, the best in the realms of solo, song, chamber, and orchestra were hired to perform for a concert series on campus. The expectation was that these performances would be enriching, providing pedagogic value to the student and a rich artistic experience for all. It is now commonplace for such a series to be run by an "artistic administrator" who is advised by a community board. Offerings include only a very small representation of Western classical music, and almost no new serious music. And now because it is the bottom line that truly matters, and because these organizations are stand-alone and thus supposedly fiscally autonomous, Broadway shows, pop acts, and whatever is culturally or ethnically "hot," such as world music performances of music or dance, often fill dates of a campus concert series. In this sphere the boundary between art and entertainment has been completely eroded.

The situation at our leading conservatories is somewhat different. Students attending these institutions aspire to solo careers or seats in our very best orchestras. Students may have the talent to accomplish these goals, but of course, most don't. Their time is mostly spent in practice, and academic courses of any kind, music or general, are regarded as more of a nuisance than something important. Their job prospects are tough. Orchestra positions are few and far between, because musicians play until they drop, and orchestras are increasingly retrenching as their audiences decline. This is partly due to the overexpansion of orchestras in the sixties

and the availability of the entire repertoire on CD or online services. Solo careers are also languishing as concert series simply cease to exist—piano and song concerts, once a rich part of the cultural scene, are pretty much a thing of the past.

What role does classical music play in the general university environment today? A marginal one. While in the past a decent minority of the faculty, administration, and even a president or two knew and enjoyed parts of the classical repertoire, this now hardly exists. These parties may appreciate a little jazz and love classic rock (the music they made out and got stoned to as adolescents), but Western classical music in no way engages them. Today's music faculty pretty much go about their business, but there is a sense of ennui in the air. Talented and competent, most actually love what they do, but they know that what they teach matters as little to the general university culture as it does to the larger culture.

Certainly, what the music faculty and students have to offer is no longer considered of much value on campus. They feel, and are, marginalized. A few may try to be hip, but it is a hollow game. Coaches are paid millions, athletes coddled, and concerts need to be scheduled around basketball and football games. On the academic side, scientists bring in the big money through private and public research grants. The schools of business and law, of public health and medicine are endowed by their successful graduates and major community philanthropists. The arts and the humanities, which only provide reasons for life and attempt to talk about why it's worth living, are the abandoned stepchildren who take the backseat—or bench—to all the rest.

The music community understands its perceived value, which is slight, and knows that there is not much it can do to change this perception. Simply put, music generally has little educational, financial, or communal clout on campus. So while schools of music, and even conservatories, are putting up the good fight for the tradition of Western classical music, they are beset by forces within their own spheres, the culture within the university, and the culture at large that makes this increasingly difficult to sustain.

Postscript: A Brief Modern Classical Music Reading and Listening List

A fine text for an overview of Western Music is the *Vintage Guide to Classical Music* by Jan Swafford (Vintage Books, 1992). Swafford is a true Renaissance musician who received his DMA in composition from the Yale

School of Music and has made his career writing music, biographies of composers (Ives, Brahms, and soon one of Beethoven), and teaching writing, film music, and composition. Readers of this book will encounter the lucidity and insights of a fine composer, the ability to communicate to the non- musician, and the wordsmithing of a felicitous writer.

And if you are looking for a few compositions that will really blow you away (particularly if you belong to the pop music-loving crowd), let me make the following recommendations.

If you don't know Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, start here. This is a shattering introduction to the twentieth century in all of its grandeur, rhythmic vivaciousness, overwhelmingly beautiful orchestration, and sophisticated primitivism. Then give Varèse a whirl with *Octandre* and *Intégrale*. Varèse helped bring percussion into the limelight and was a favorite of that mother of invention, Frank Zappa (father of Moon Unit). Then hit *Song of the Youths* by that very weird German, Stockhausen, who influenced the Beatles, particularly with respect to "Revolution 9," a tune that contains the famous loop of a man repeating the words "number 9, number 9, number 9." Okay, enough with the Europeans. For some very hip American music check out John Adams's *Shaker Loops*, one of the great works in the minimalist mode. Also try Steve Reich's *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, another great work in the genre and still one of his best pieces. As long as we are in this camp, there's Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, still his most important piece. Christopher Rouse has written music influenced by rockers so try his *Gorgon and Violin Concerto*. For sheer beauty and, yes, the influence of jazz and pop, listen to Stephen Albert's *Symphony No. 1* and Robert Beaser's *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Lastly, check out my *Gateways*, *Symphony No. 3,* and *Piano Concerto*, with the incomparable pianist Andre-Michel Schub in the starring role.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 2

TARNISHED GOLD: CLASSICAL MUSIC IN AMERICA

A few articles have appeared recently regarding the subject of the health of classical music (or more broadly, the fine arts) in America. These include "Classical Music's New Golden Age," by Heather Mac Donald, in the *City Journal* and "The Decline of the Audience," by Terry Teachout, in *Commentary*.[1] These articles appeared around the time of my Summer 2010 *Academic Questions* piece, "Diminuendo: Classical Music and the Academy," (see chapter 1) in which I discussed the problematic position of classical music in the Academy.

In my article, I felt it necessary to place the position of music in the Academy in relationship to that of music in society-at-large. As these other articles also discuss the nature of music in larger society, it seems appropriate to respond to the positions expressed, to explain and try to understand their differences or commonality with my opinions, and then, of course, to explain why I and those who agree with my position are correct. In "Classical Music's New Golden Age," Mac Donald takes a highly optimistic view of the relative strength and vitality of classical music in America, and/or in the world at large. She says, "[N]ever before has so much great music been available to so many people, performed at levels of artistry that would have astounded Berlioz and his peers. Students flock to conservatories and graduate with skills once possessed only by a few virtuosi. More people listen to classical music today, and more money gets spent on producing and disseminating it, than ever before." She notes that recording technology has changed the way we hear music, not least by making it widely available. She then goes on to state: "True, the tidal wave of creation that generated the masterpieces we so magnificently perform is spent; we're left to scavenge the marvels that it cast up." She then lauds the

[1] Heather Mac Donald, "Classical Music's New Golden Age," *City Journal* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2010); Terry Teachout, "The Decline of the Audience," *Commentary* 129, no. 4 (April 2010), 39–41.

"early music" movement for opening the doors to the music of the past in ways previously inconceivable, and thus providing not only an enlarged repertory of accessible music, but, through rigorous attention to past historical practice, a completely new way of hearing music. In fact, she decries contemporary classical works and says that the real "new music" is "the standard repertoire, such as Mozart's symphonies, performed in entirely new ways; and unknown repertoire from the pre-Classical period."

Mac Donald does acknowledge that classical musical education in America is at an abysmally low level, but stresses that Asians are in love with Western classical music and are filling our conservatories here in the States. Also n the negative side, she quotes Leon Botstein, president of Bard College and conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, about support of classical music: "What is different today is that the nation's elite, the very rich, don't care about classical music. The patron class is philistine; instead of Andrew Carnegie, we have Donald Trump. Some rich guy with a hedge fund wants to be photographed with Angelina Jolie, not support the Cleveland Orchestra."

Still, Mac Donald ends with the following glowing comments: "[P]resent-day abundance of classical music—of newly rediscovered works, consummate performances, thousands of recordings, and legions of fans—is a testament to its deep roots in human feeling. And it is a cause for celebration that so many people still feel drawn into its web of lethal beauty, in a world so far from the one that gave it birth."

Let's go through Ms. Mac Donald's positions one-by-one with commentary. "Never before has so much great music been [and I would certainly add, abundantly] available." Mac Donald is referring to the profusion of live performances of orchestral and chamber music, and the presence of a multitude of recordings. As Teachout notes in "The Decline of the Audience": "The latest Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the fourth such survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts since 1982, reveals an across-the-board decline in public attendance at fine-arts events of all kinds," specifically "a smaller segment of the adult population either attended arts performances or visited arts museums or galleries than in any prior survey." And the statement perhaps most germane to our discussion: "Between 1982 and 2008, the percentage of adult Americans who attended at least one classical-music performance in the preceding year plummeted from 13 percent to 9.3 percent."

There is a a certain anomaly. That is, while music is certainly more abundantly available, fewer people are actually going to hear it. Perhaps more folks are listening to recorded music either on CD or through downloads. The question we must pose about this other form of music delivery is, therefore, does the form of delivery matter? In my *AQ* article I argue that it does. Rarely does a recorded experience provide the transcendence of a live performance. Listening to a recording can prepare one for such an experience; it can allow for study and for a greatly deepened understanding of a work. But for a real artistic encounter with the ineffable, don't count on a recording.

Mac Donald also claims that "never before has so much great music been performed at levels of such artistry, and . . . students flock to conservatories and graduate with skills once possessed only by a few virtuosi." I can't quibble with this statement. What I do state in my *AQ* article is that technique is far superior now to what it was in the past, but that the heart, and thus empathy, is missing in both the performer and the listener, and thus the true nature of the musical experience matters much less. Everything is there except real communication and experience. If this doesn't transpire, the essence of musical experience doesn't either. There is quite frequently no "there" there.

Mac Donald states: "More people listen to classical music today, and more money gets spent on producing and disseminating it, than ever before." *Hmm.* This is undoubtedly true, as there are more people alive now than ever before, and classical music is available worldwide as never before, because the world has become smaller and more interconnected through the magic of technology. I am delighted that the classical music audience is growing exponentially in Asia (and hope that those selling my CDs are working those countries diligently!), but I must admit that I am most concerned about the state of affairs in the ol' US of A.

Teachout mentions that "[a]nyone who goes to the theater or to classical- music performances has long been accustomed to sitting among a sea of bald and gray heads. Even such technologically up-to-date enterprises as the closed-circuit opera telecasts transmitted from New York's Metropolitan Opera House to movie theaters across America draw crowds consisting mainly of senior citizens." In other words, the audience is aging pretty drastically. This experience is replicated in my home city of Tucson, Arizona, where at the tender age of 57 I seemingly represent youth when attending local symphony or chamber music society performances. And it isn't for lack of trying to reach out to a younger audience on the part of such

organizations. As Teachout and I allude to in our pieces, whereas in our 1950s and 1960s upbringing high art was part of the general cultural conversation as expressed "on commercial TV and network radio...[and] in *Time*, *Life*, and other mass- circulation magazines," now high art is simply not part of the conversation, public or private.

Mac Donald says that the real "new music" is "the standard repertoire, such as Mozart's symphonies, performed in entirely new ways; and unknown repertoire from the pre-Classical period." Of course, this is where I must, as a very much alive composer, take greatest umbrage with her argument. About twenty years ago I remember sitting in on a lecture discussion with a great jazz legend who said, "Of course, jazz is really America's classical music." I immediately bristled—and still do. Why did he deem it necessary to displace Copland, Ives, Bernstein, and a host of others, including me, to elevate jazz? And why usurp a term that at that time, if not now, had a pretty clear meaning? So why does Mac Donald usurp the term "new music" to define new recordings of standard repertoire music (e.g. Mozart, Beethoven, etc.) played with either more or less vibrato, more or less in tune, a little faster or slower, and with slightly more or fewer players? And as for all that "newly discovered old music," most of it is second- or third-rate, and deservedly left to oblivion—or to those completists who have a lot of time on their hands. Of course, the primary problem is that Mac Donald isn't aware of the myriad great works of the twentieth century, and the fact that the teleological issue in music isn't resolved as she suggests; namely, that the game is over, we don't always get better, we don't have anything fresh to say, and the only thing left to do is continuously regurgitate past masterworks and burrow into history's delightful pockets of previously unheard junk. While there *is* great music from the past still to be heard, and there is always the possibility of uncovering new treasures that will speak to us in a unique and vibrant way, there is also great music of the present to be experienced.

Mac Donald notes that "recording technology has changed the way we hear music, not to mention its abundant availability." She views this as an extreme positive, while Teachout is much more guarded or pessimistic in his understanding of the influence of technology. To quote him at length:

> Live music was the first of the fine arts to be threatened by the rise of mechanical reproduction . . . by making it possible for the owner of a phonograph to listen to recordings of the standard classical repertoire by the greatest orchestras and soloists of the day, the musicians who made those recordings also unwittingly undermined the institution of the public

> concert. It took the better part of a century for the effects of this development to become manifest, but today they are self-evident to everyone in the shaky business of giving or presenting classical-music concerts. Today most Americans under the age of 30 are habituated to experiencing art not in the communal setting of a public performance but wherever and whenever they may wish to experience it, be it at home, in a plane, or on the beach. For them, live performance is not the normal condition of art but a tiresomely inconvenient alternative to consuming art on demand.

It is here that I picked up this thread in my article, for most college students are under thirty, or are being catered to by individuals who are older and know that this is in fact their state of functioning and state of mind. And of course, there is a problem for performers if they are not actually performing on a regular basis. This explains the consternation in the performance world and the attempts being made to find methodologies that will bring audiences back to live performance venues. As Dr. Brown said to Marty in *Back to the Future*, "It's not you that's the problem, it's your kids!"

As already noted, Mac Donald ends positively: "[T]he present-day abundance of classical music—of newly rediscovered works, consummate performances, thousands of recordings, and legions of fans—is a testament to its deep roots in human feeling." As previously stated, I am less impressed by those newly rediscovered works of questionable quality and thousands of recordings, most with little new to say and sterile to boot. As for the legion of fans, they simply aren't replicating in America. But we can address the real question, which concerns "human feeling." Teachout ends his article by commenting that

> it is hard to imagine what the fine arts might be like if eager men and women no longer gathered in groups to experience their life-transforming power . . . [A] world without audiences would be a world denuded of one of the things that makes art an act of self-transcendence, a way of embracing the world and its myriad possibilities. . . . [T]he experience of art has always been a fundamentally *social* phenomenon, one that brings human beings together and encourages them to submerge their differences in the shared pursuit of joy and understanding. Therein lies an essential part of the meaning of art—a part that is now at risk.

In an America that is placing ever greater attention on the individual self, a self that has lost its ability to process its own emotions and make sense of its interiority, and in an age in which the very notion of transcendence brings a snicker, the fate of classical music is in jeopardy.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 3

A MUSING ON GUNTHER SCHULLER'S *MUSINGS*

For many years Gunther Schuller was at the center of the classical music world, as a player, composer, conductor, writer, record producer, polemicist, publisher for new music and jazz, educator, and president of New England Conservatory.

I met Schuller at Tanglewood in 1979. While I was not an effective student (there was way too much careerist hustling in the air), it was an exhilarating experience. Gunther would occasionally mark me with his gaze and utter some pronouncement such as "Make sure you really hear the music you write" (I was then doing mostly textural stuff marked by the influence of my main teacher, Jacob Druckman, and other favorites including György Ligeti, Witold Lutoslawski, and Earle Brown) or "I am a good B composer" (very unusual for Gunther, who has, one could say, a healthy ego; but then, don't most composers?). By that point, Gunther had written extensively about jazz and new music, although I hadn't taken much notice. Then, and to almost the same extent now, I am more interested in what a composer says in his music than in his words. But if some things can only be said in music, the same is true for words.

Recently, I came across Schuller's *Musings* (1986) shortly after I put my ideas about John Cage and Elliott Carter out into the world.[1] The subtitled *The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller: A Collection of His Writings*, is intriguing as a historical document and deserving of commentary. About the first third of *Musings* concerns jazz. These essays are pithy takes on important issues or seminal figures in jazz. Thus, Schuller covers the definition of jazz, its early history, the nature of form—"We must

[1] Gunther Schuller, *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller: A Collection of His Writings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Daniel Asia, "The Put On of the Century, or the Cage Centenary," *Huffington Post*, January 3, 2013.

learn to think of form as a verb rather than a noun"[2]—and looks at Ellington, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Paul Whiteman, Scott Joplin, Sonny Rollins, Lee Konitz, and Alec Wilder. The remaining two-thirds of *Musings* examines the world of contemporary classical music in sections titled "Music Performance and Contemporary Music" and "Music Aesthetics and Education." These essays first appeared in print from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, a seminal cultural and musical period. It should come as no surprise that Schuller displays a large degree of growth, even a complete change of viewpoint, during this period.

Let's start with Schuller's take on his created genre, "third stream." This term, which denotes a comingling of jazz and classical, was, for Schuller, figuratively a verb. Thus he meant it always to be something in development, in the process of becoming, and certainly not a fixed genre or category. One might even ask if the term could be broadened to include the comingling of *any* musics with Western classical music, as in African drumming for Steve Reich, Indian music for Philip Glass, or pop for John Adams. But as Schuller states over and over, it isn't about the makeup of the music or its influences— "I don't care what category music belongs to; I only care whether it is good or bad."[3] He says that as an artist he must call on all musical experiences in his life that have meaning for him. That, by necessity, these experiences must come to play in his musical creations. And that what subsequently is written must come out of a deep respect for both traditions. Schuller also thinks that all classical and vernacular traditions are worthy of our support and interest. "*All musics are created equal*," he asserted in 1981, and it "is a global concept which allows the world's musics . . . to come together, to learn from one another, to reflect human diversity and pluralism" (emphasis in original).[4]

It is a utopian concept at heart, and as Schuller would learn, in the realm of contemporary classical music, utopianism doesn't work very well, as we shall see. So in its universal conception, do Schuller's views leave any room for the authentically particular? And can all musics be "equal," inasmuch as only Western music embraces harmony and polyphony, and no other music has these qualities (except perhaps for jazz, because it is as much a Western as a black phenomenon, in its combining of harmony and African polyrhythms). The only music Schuller really despises, incidentally, is

[2] Schuller, "Third Stream Revisited," *Musings*, 19.

[3] Schuller, "Third Stream," *Musings*, 115.

[4] *Ibid*., 120.

commercial music—that is, music written for the market, which implies music for hire as well as most popular music.

But when push comes to shove and concert space and time is limited, decisions must be made. Performance and music choices can't be made on the simple distinction between music that comes from the heart and music that is purely commercial, as Schuller does. He suggests that in the future the idea of a "third stream" will be inevitable, and he views it with relish. I wonder what he thinks now. In this 1961 essay he asks that the music be appraised on its own terms, and not that of the critics. Perhaps he makes this request because third stream music never really caught on, while a bland and pureed crossover did.

In the 1980s, Schuller was the major advisor for the country's most prominent new music showcase, the Fromm New Music Festival at Tanglewood, where he was criticized for his unwillingness to countenance diversity in the realm of concert music. Quite simply, it was said that he forbade the inclusion of the minimalists Reich, Glass, and Adams (the last then counted in that circle). Now even if this music proves not to last, it was a puzzling position for Schuller to take. For was not Reich, who grew up on jazz, and then studied African drumming in Ghana, and was a philosophy student as well, a perfect example of the symbiotic possibilities of the third stream approach? Was not Glass, who studied with both Nadia Boulanger and Ravi Shankar, another paradigmatic example of the definition? Or Adams, who studied with Leon Kirchner, a Schoenberg pupil, who then wished to integrate the vitality of American pop with a plethora of American influences ranging from Charles Ives to Morton Feldman to Glenn Branca? What more could Schuller have asked for—or was this not the third stream that he had envisioned?

I can understand that Schuller may not have cared for or respected such composers, but from an intellectual standpoint, their musical works fit his definition of third stream well. And when you call for a revolution, you cannot control the outcome.

As a young composer, Schuller was very much attuned to the notion of musical progress, as exemplified by his belief in, and the near deification of, the "twelve-tone language," as he calls it.[5] In this, he was aligned with the European avant-garde, moving from Schoenberg and Anton Webern (as he rarely mentions Alban Berg; I suspect he thought him a backslider) to

[5] Schuller, "Composing for Orchestra," *Musings*, 153.

Pierre Boulez and Milton Babbitt. He makes the point, referencing performers rather than the common man, when he states: "I believe that the time will come when the twelve-tone language will be so familiar that sophisticated players and listeners will hear and 'feel' derived sets, such as those used in this *Symphony*" or in his Tanglewood programs that were full of academic serialists.[6] But his messianism, like that of Schoenberg and Boulez, simply hasn't worked out—the music never caught on, neither grabbing a multitude of performers, nor intriguing enough ears to sell tickets.

All of this seems to have dawned on Schuller by 1978, as expressed in a lecture delivered at Goucher College. He begins by stating that "it must seem to be obvious to everyone that what we call 'contemporary music'… has failed to capture the sustained interest of either lay audiences or professional performers; in fact, it has encountered a stone wall of resistance and apathy."[7] He observes that the music seems to communicate to no one, that not even the new generation has picked it up, and that over time, it is the audience who finally decides what lasts. Schuller thought that some music would have to wait the requisite thirty years before being accepted, and recognizes this may not be the case. He specifically mentions Schoenberg, Webern, and Ives. (Actually, he is a little off the mark in this; audiences and musicians clearly have established pre-serial Schoenberg, some Webern, and certainly Ives as at least centrally tangential to the ongoing tradition. As I write this, Leonard Slatkin and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra have just performed all four Ives symphonies on one program at Carnegie Hall!)

Be that as it may, with a nod to neoromanticism, Schuller then does the important job of deciphering what has transpired in the last seventy years. It is a true baring of the soul. Schuller describes the rush to newness at the turn of the twentieth century—think Debussy's *Jeux* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* as examples—with the retreat into neoclassicism of the 1920s and the headlong plunge into the avant-garde of the 1940s and 1950s. He notes that the innovations of the twenties were taken up again, this time with a vengeance. "[V]ast new vistas were opened up, unheard of new freedoms were perceived and virtually no controls or predeterminations were exercised. . . . [W]e regarded all of these changes and gains as positive . . . but there was almost no questioning of where we were going at such

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Schuller, "Toward a New Classicism?" *Musings*, 174.

headlong speeds, and whether in fact we were looking at gains or losses."[8] This is quite a thing for an avant-garde composer to admit. Neither Karlheinz Stockhausen nor Boulez has ever uttered such a statement. Ligeti, to his honor, did so, stating, "I am an enemy of ideologies in the arts," as did George Rochberg: "All human gestures are available to all human beings at any time."[9]

For Schuller it all comes down to a matter of *freedom without control*. He says that there were more losses than gains, that even the gains weren't under control or mastery, and that they were more technical than substantive. Composers were seduced into notions of complexity and intellectualism for their own sake, and were taught that writing music is a technical matter, not an emotional, spiritual, or cultural one. But if one wished to push the boundaries of comprehensibility, shouldn't there also have been a push to greater emotion, simplicity, and even humanity? Like Rochberg, Schuller notes that it makes no sense to suggest that to accept something new one must totally reject the objects and lessons of the past. He even says "we lost the whole meaning and usage of melody and theme," and that writing a good one just isn't as easy as it might seem.[10]

Schuller notes the same problem in that exalted realm of harmony, "that wonderful mysterious thing that enables us in diatonic music to go from major to minor. . . . We lost the ability to deal in bright or dark harmonies—insofar as we thought about harmonies at all."[11] Repetition wasn't allowed and, most grievous, neither was recognizable form. In summary, Schuller notes the doctrinaire and unyielding nature of the philosophical posture. No mixing of tonality and atonality was allowed; exceptions became the norm; and immediacy, accessibility, memorability, directness, and simplicity were all considered banal, and thus unusable. These were, of course, the principles of the European New Music dogma, propounded by Boulez, Stockhausen et al., of the 1950s to 1980s.

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[8] *Ibid.,* 178.

[9] Ligeti quote cited in "Schott Music Mourns for György Ligeti," Schott Music, June 12, 2006, http://www.schott-music.com/news/archive/show,74.html; Rochberg quote cited in "George Rochberg," Theodore Presser Company, http://www.presser.com/Composers/info.cfm?Name=GEORGEROCHBERG

[10] Schuller, "Toward a New Classicism?" 179.

[11] *Ibid.*

And finally, Schuller asks that composers return to the task in which all of the great masters engaged: to use and coordinate all of the elements of music fully. The goal of composition should remain as it has long been: to make music that elicits an emotional reaction, from goose bumps to tears. This cannot be accomplished through a shedding of all that we have experienced and learned over the last century, but rather by balancing the old with the new, the traditional with the experimental, and that which make us truly human, the emotions and the intellect.

This task must be undertaken by each composer, with the hope that someone will succeed. Perhaps Schuller's music might lead us to this blessed place. Maybe his compositions, like *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee*, will survive the brutality of time and judgment—the many performances of which, as a utopian modernist, he decried, while pondering why his hardcore twelve-tone works were not performed. Schuller seems to have answered this question during the course of his maturation.

More than most, from his wide and multivarious experience, Gunther Schuller knows that music is the most unforgiving of all of the arts. What was his goal for his opera *The Visitation*? It was not to produce a radical or avant-garde work, but rather to create "a singable repertory opera that does not compromise stylistically."[12] Despite all of his pretensions to diversity, and ideas of all musics being equal, Schuller is clearly holding himself to the standard of the repertoire, that sacred canon to which some pieces belong and some do not. The verdict is still out on his music, and we shall have to wait and see how it is ultimately judged.

Schuller has won just about every award there is and strutted across many of the world's most important stages—literally and figuratively. He has tremendous energy and has contributed greatly to the musical scene throughout his long life. We should be grateful for his contribution, and his candor.

[12] Schuller, "Concerning My Opera *The Visitation*," *Musings*, 234.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 4

THE FUTURE OF (HIGH) CULTURE IN AMERICA

The mission of the University of Arizona Center for American Culture and Ideas (CACI) is to study and promote the arts, in particular, the high arts and culture in America and academia. To this end, the CACI held its inaugural conference, "The Future of (High) Culture in America," on March 19 to 21, 2014. Conference papers were presented to an audience of academics and the community at large, with each address followed by comments from a panel of two or three respondents and an audience Q and A. Presenters and respondents included practicing artists, critics, educators, academics, curators, and art purveyors.

Depending on the emphasis, the conference title can be read and understood as a statement or a question: is there high culture in America, and if so, is it in jeopardy? The title also proposes an opportunity to consider what "culture" or "high culture" means. Included in our purview: music, dance, and the visual arts (particularly photography), as well as more general presentations.

Speakers were asked to trace our cultural footprint and share their view of where we are and where we might be heading, with sufficient latitude for strongly individual and idiosyncratic approaches. The result was what we hoped for—a fascinating kaleidoscope of our conference topic. I provide here an overview of those presentations.

By necessity, CACI extends its investigation to the relationship of high art to mass or popular culture, as they frequently coexist to their mutual benefit. One need only think of Steve Reich's musical influence on the Club scene, street dance and hip-hop on ballet choreographers, the ephemera of pop culture in Warhol's art, and the impact of technology on how art is imagined and realized. This is nothing new—Haydn incorporated the popular courtly dance, the minuet, into his symphonies. This historical legacy should be better understood—but rather than submit to the postmodern blurring of these distinctions or "boundaries," CACI wishes to refine our understanding of this relationship to make those difficult

judgments of value, and to help determine what is worth spending time and treasure on in the Academy.

Terry Teachout, *Wall Street Journal* drama critic, *Commentary* critic-at-large, and our keynote speaker, presented an overview of the artistic and academic landscape, citing problems in academia and the general culture. He reviewed Heather Mac Donald's 2013 Wriston Lecture on the demise of the English major at UCLA, which outlined the now familiar sequence of events in academia: required courses in Chaucer and Shakespeare are replaced with courses in gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality studies, etc.—and that UCLA and all of academia is abandoning "the humanist reverence for past genius."

At one time, upward mobility meant that all who had the desire and interest could engage in high culture. This is no longer regarded as a desirable notion, since high culture is not really viewed as "better" than pop culture. Consider the example of classical music, for which audiences and sales are rapidly decreasing; it is rarely presented on PBS and barely taught in our schools. We all know the problem: the classical arts and their appreciation is in decline. As a biographer of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, Teachout recognizes the value of popular culture, but not at the expense of the legacy and future of high culture, which he defines simply as "large-scale works of art that aim higher than their popular counterparts."

Teachout suggested that "a culture that is dominated by popular art is by definition limited." He doesn't want a masterpiece to be dismissed or demeaned, but rather to be engaged, because "egalitarianism be damned: it really is better." So what can be done? "We must now make the case for the fine arts," Teachout argued, in all parts of society, through persuasion, education, and persistent leadership. All who believe in the fine arts must become their advocates. And dear to my heart and CACI, he said we must "also develop and foster *new* institutions that exist solely to support and promote high culture." Our job is to celebrate "convincingly the glories of high art"—not because it is good for us, but just because it is good.

In "The Submerged Center and the Poetic Imagination: Impact of Technology on Art and Culture," Paul Pines, poet, novelist, librettist, and practicing psychotherapist, examined some of the factors affecting the possibility, understanding, or even the definition of high culture.

If high culture exists, where might we find it? In the "historical consensus of universally valued products," perhaps, or, in Mathew Arnold's

words, "the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere." At the same time, Pines is nervous about where the twentieth century took us—"High culture, subject to a rate of change equivalent to that of the G-force that pulls spacecraft loose from gravity, may be unrecognizable"—and, most important, where the symbology central to man's understanding of himself—religious, philosophical, or archetypal—has been drastically attenuated.

Pines traces the roots of high culture to the notions of the sacred in many cultures, from Aztec, Chinese, and Indian, to Jewish and Christian, reminding us that high culture has reference to the singular vision, understood as the shamanistic, individual, poetic imagination. Yet he thinks that

> prior to the twentieth century, the circle-squared archetype of wholeness passed easily from one civilization to the next until it hit a hard edge midway through modernism, and broke. Cracks had appeared at the dawn of the nineteenth century, but went largely unobserved….Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx declared that nothing is what it appears to be; all received wisdom and articles of faith must be regarded with suspicion . . . Fitzgerald wrote about the death of high culture when the novel, which he'd thought "the most powerful medium of conveying thought and feeling from one human being to another," had become "subordinate to a mechanical and communal art . . . capable of only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion." Poetic imagination had given way to Hollywood, a collaborative medium which fed on the obvious.

Our postmodern time is one of numbness, a result of the onslaught of constant stimulation, which creates a state of emotional atrophy, "when the soul turns numb and poetic imagination goes underground." This may be a necessary response to the frantic rate of change, but with numbness comes stress, and this state precludes the self-understanding and self-reflection needed to take in what the great works of high culture have to tell us.

Next, Pines addressed "the problem of high culture," suggesting that many ways to understand the term exist, most obviously the "privileged procession of products agreed upon by consensus." These products come from everywhere, throughout time. They are often found in the least expected places. They can also be found in time alone, in "numinous moments that pass and are gone," as in a great jazz performance, or captured by a photograph. This leads to a definition of high culture as "that which connects us to the submerged center, conduit for poetic imagination, moves people beyond numbness, dumbness, violence, and blind belief, absorbs

pain that is otherwise not addressable—and suggests something permanent in the midst of impermanence."

If high culture is to continue to exist, and this is a big "if," it will rely on another human capability that has become attenuated—memory. "Memory is the guardian of meaning. There is no high culture without it. . . . Memory has been a prime casualty of the pleasure culture and hive mentality." Pines concluded with the hopeful thought that genius, however, will always be present—somehow, somewhere—and lead us, if not to sacred ground, at least on the sacred path.

Carol Iannone, editor-at-large of *Academic Questions*, presented "Plato Was Right," arguing that Plato remains a fine prism through which to look at the spectrum of high, middle, and low culture. She discussed three important Platonic ideas.

First, the idea of democracy is a leveling force, since when applied to the aesthetic realm it inevitably leads to a lack of serious criteria to apply to the quality of artistic objects—to the willy-nilly equivalence, for example, of a velvet Elvis and a Vermeer. After all, who decides what is the good? Second, since for Plato all art is a poor copy of reality, "if the artist is to portray truth, and not a distorted image, he must be open to that order of reality above the merely sensual and physical." And third, intellect and reason must rein in the unruly appetites and desires, as well as the desires to strive and achieve, which can result in works that sensationalize sex and violence.

While Iannone recognizes that this can sound like fascism to the modern sensibility, she cautions that the uses and abuses of art are important, because "art can mislead, defraud, corrupt, as well as undermine social, cultural, and even political coherence." She finds this particularly true in the modern and postmodern periods, when artists have engaged in what twentieth-century critic Lionel Trilling suggested was the virtual "canonization" of the "primal" and "nonethical," or, as Adam Kirsch glosses in writing of Trilling's work, "the idea that what we call evil is actually good: that the primal is superior to the civilized, passion superior to reason."

Iannone noted that "the repudiation of traditional morality was accompanied by an elevation of art as a kind of substitute religion. The work of art became an autonomous entity. . . . This led to a kind of sacralization of the aesthetic that permitted the arts to go further and further into shock, violation, transgression." While her references are primarily literary,

Iannone finds that nihilism, love of the degenerate, depictions of graphic sex and violence (often united), dehumanization, and the description of man as anything but a sacred creature, has infected all the arts.

As antidote, Iannone discussed the controversy surrounding Jonathan Franzen's 2001 novel, *The Corrections*, which won the National Book award and was an Oprah Winfrey Book Club selection. Considering this somewhat of a watershed in postmodern, or post-postmodern literature, Iannone sees Franzen as a real writer who has come out the other side, has something to say, and says it without his colleagues' ironic veneer. As she noted, Franzen has given up on the kind of postmodern literature that demands a Talmudic compendium to help the reader forge through, but is rather seeking his way back to the tradition of high literature that is both deep and accessible.

Iannone also took on the trend toward regarding television dramas as a new addition to high art. Like Teachout, she finds these to be trivial, repetitive, formulaic, and morally empty. "Far from being great works of dramatic vision and artistry, they are really just glorified soap operas, far more brutal and lurid, to be sure, and with slicker production values than those of the past, and, without any sense of the moral center of the older versions." Yet she sees a glimmer of hope overall, as "fortunately, some artists are poking their heads outside the cave to get more in touch with the whole toward which Plato points us."

In "Women and Long-Haired Libidinous Foreigners: Classical Music and American Democracy," Jan Swafford, independent composer and writer, provided a witty, intimate history of classical music from the founding of the American colonies to today. Describing the somewhat ambivalent situation of this music in America, Swafford used Boston, his hometown, as his point of reference.

What we term high art spread erratically across America in the eighteenth century—as to be expected in a land in the act of self-creation, whose first goal was survival and the formation of a democratic society. In the early 1800s Europe was at the height of musical creativity, with Haydn and Beethoven churning out masterpieces. In the New World, people sang and played music, but almost no works of sophistication were being created, and no performing institutions yet existed, since performance typically occurred in the church with the singing of hymns—hardly a high art.

This changed in the nineteenth century, with a "messy democracy in action that included amateur passion, outsized personalities, enthusiasm outrunning experience, and rampant can-doism. Boston, like other major American cities, had a world-class professional orchestra, an opera house, a new generation of native composers, and an important conservatory. At the same time, African American spirituals and ragtime conquered the globe." The Handel and Mozart Society, typical of those created elsewhere, had the primary goal of improving church singing, but had the further effect of introducing to America the best music from the Old World.

Whereas in Europe classical music had been supported by the aristocracy and then a burgeoning middle class, in America it had to find support within a democratic environment, and from bottom-middle-up as well as top-down. Classical music was always struggling for its existence, always in danger of being irrelevant. Yet it gained strength through increased sophistication, serious musical pretentions, and the outsized personalities of various conductors, entrepreneurs, and writers, who combined serious musical aspirations with the organizational skills of pastors and churchmen of the huge tent gatherings of the Great Awakening. And "with the debut of a new musical force in Boston . . . the top-down model of spreading musical culture entered the town in a big way: the advent in 1881 of the Boston Symphony Orchestra." But typical of America, the institutional doors were made open to all, a situation similar to recently founded artistic institutions around the country.

Swafford is intrigued by the proliferation of classical culture during the twentieth century, dismayed by its downward decline the last quarter of the century, and worried about the ensuing mass culture tsunami and the demise of music as a participatory activity:

> A healthy artistic culture is both bottom-up and top-down, commercial and non-commercial, and encompasses private patrons and entrepreneurs and investment from government. I think the situation in all the arts these days is a gigantic financial and aesthetic mess, but that doesn't mean good work can't be done. . . . Popular culture is an irresistible juggernaut, but why should it be the only culture available? . . .Classical music is not about snobbery, not about class, but rather about life and emotion—for me, the most emotional music there is. I've also argued that the spectrum of Western classical music over the last thousand years is so broad that anyone can find a place in it.

In "The Sleeping Beauty: New Clothes for an Awakened Princess," dance critic and writer Elizabeth Kendall gave a brief history and summary

of the state of ballet and dance in our post-Balanchine age, defining dance, for the purposes of her presentation, as "any kind of dance intended for a proscenium, or a performing space, and for an audience." She focused on ballet.

Kendall began with ballet's origins in the court of Louis XIV, the subsequent move to a new site of importance, Russia, in the nineteenth century, its centrality to the Romantic ethos, and the momentous impact of Diaghilev's stateless Ballet Russe in Paris and Europe in the early twentieth century.

Next, Kendall focused on ballet in America, which began with the arrival of former Ballet Russe star Balanchine and the creation of his School of American Ballet, the great attention given to Russian dance defectors such as Rudolf Nureyev, and subsequent support for dance from the Ford Foundation, all of which brought dance to the center of the American cultural conversation. These factors helped create the American dance boom of the 1970s, "in which dance was simultaneously reaffirmed and venerated in high-art venues, and vilified and deconstructed in counter-culture venues. What was important, though . . . was that dance mattered; dance was *talked about* in the culture as a whole—not just modern and contemporary forms of dance, but the highest level in the art, classical ballet."

While Kendall acknowledged that dance isn't quite what it was in its 1970s heyday, she is cautiously optimistic. The system of technical training in America is extensive and solid, and a dance audience exists that is committed and excited. And while we may not have a Balanchine, there are numerous skilled choreographers who speak to us and for our time. Kendall finds the work of Alexei Ratmansky at the American Ballet Theatre and Robert Garland of the Dance Theater of Harlem particularly exemplary. She added that virtuoso dancers who can provide what all audiences hope for—a transcendent experience—are performing around the country. Dance, therefore, is a thriving member of the high art scene in America.

In "Photography, Perception, Cognition: Past, Present, Future," Brit Salveson, curator of photography at the Los Angeles County Museum (LACM) and former director of the University of Arizona's unique Center for Creative Photography, examined the curious, ambiguous, and polymorphous nature of photography in the postmodern museum environment and its interaction with the larger, omnipresent, visual culture.

Photography is a new art form or medium that has grown up with modernity. Pictures themselves are ubiquitous; in fact we fairly drown in them. A picture can be documentary, expressive, or both. The state of photography can be seen in various polarities: "education versus entertainment, specialization versus cross-disciplinarity, expertise versus crowd sourcing, contemplation versus sociality, intellectual property versus open sourcing." In the museum, either regular or encyclopedic (as is LACM), the positioning of photography has changed. Whereas photographs used to be placed in a side room or basement, they now appear front and center. Photography is also popular with current audiences, as we are now all photographers and curators.

So where does this leave the professional curator? The task is to create encounters between objects and viewers. While expertise involves "deep knowledge" the curator of photography must seek a breadth of knowledge along with encounters with the new. Once discoveries have been made, the best way to present them to an audience must be found.

Since most photography is contemporary, it bridges past and future. It is a more fluid visual form than others, and photography may be just one tool of the artist, used more for its communicative nature rather than for the permanence associated with painting or sculpture. The medium is postmodern in that it suggests the immanence of the moment, rather than the individual grappling with process and medium over time.

The curator must be open to false starts, even to failure; by its omnipresence there will be more questionable results. Even though there are many questions regarding photography as a mass art and its associations with sensory overload and narcissism, we must remember that these issues are not new. While the situation is chaotic, it is also alive and exciting. We are in the midst of a new "spectatorial engagement with imagery, with each other, and with the world." It is imperative that the dialogue about the effects and nature of photography continues.

Finally, in "Human Achievement and Innovation in the Arts: A New Educational Paradigm and Future for the Arts," I offered reasons contemporary culture, and more specifically, the current academy, need the CACI. I also spoke about our first curricular offering, the pan-arts course "Human Achievement and Innovation in the Arts."

Culture is as or more important than any other sphere of activity in America. We placed "high" in the conference title in parenthesis because

we must differentiate high, middle, and low, or high and popular. There are strong reasons to make these distinctions, and to argue for the teaching and promulgation of high culture in the larger culture and specifically in academia. The first is the simple *good* of high art. Two other reasons are time and money. College students have four years to learn something that matters to them for the rest of their lives. Money, while fungible, is not infinite. Time and money should be spent on what has known and lasting value, and provides a rock-solid foundation for appreciating life and for creating something fresh.

CACI engages in this conversation within a university environment that is mostly hostile to high culture and where discussion of the topic is often problematic. So be it.

Another goal of the center is to provide students with an "ennobling vision" through an encounter with the best that mankind has produced in the arts specifically, and other areas of human inquiry and achievement more generally. We use that adjective knowing that it is somewhat old-fashioned, just as we do the words "elitist" and "connoisseurship."

The ignorance of our students and the general population of the great intellectual legacy of humanity is astonishing. One can no longer assume that everyone has heard a Beethoven symphony, read or seen a Shakespeare play, or is familiar with the institutions we refer to as "The Met." The ongoing and increasingly aggressive politicization of the university has contributed to this ignorance by gutting the traditional curriculum in favor of "theory." Thus, CACI's primary goal is to educate. In this regard, CACI is setting out to produce a new core curriculum for our time. The first course it created is the aforementioned "Human Achievement and Innovation in the Arts" (HAIA).

Most arts students know little outside their own domain and most non-arts students know almost nothing of the arts. And taking an art or music appreciation course only covers a piece of the whole. The solution is to present in one course the best in *all* of the arts—visual, music, and the dance.

HAIA begins with a philosophical component: How does one determine what is beautiful and of merit, and what is Art? Today, it's not enough to say, "This is good for you because it has been determined by others to be so." Students must be drawn into the conversation. Appropriate terminology for each discipline is introduced, as students must be able to

speak and write about these disciplines. They also learn how to use their eyes and ears as precision tools.

The course proceeds chronologically from 8000 BCE until the 1970s, where the journey stops due to time limits and that thereafter less consensus exists of what has lasting value. This historical progression demonstrates the developmental nature of the arts, the ebb and flow of their various fortunes, and how they are affected by historical, political, technological, and economic changes. It begins with visual art, adds music, then dance.

HAIA brashly presents masterworks as living presences and engages in conversation with them and their creators. This aliveness to the genius of individual personality is critical to this teaching enterprise.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 5

DEAR FUTURE ARTS PROFESSOR

In fields such as the arts where it is very difficult to make even a middle class living, we must ask our prospective students, "Is there any other way you can imagine living your life other than _? (Fill in the blank with writing music, playing an instrument, writing poems, dancing, studying Greek, painting, or sculpting.) If there is, it will provide a more secure livelihood. But if you can't imagine doing *anything* other than devoting your life to an art or the humanities, then we should keep talking."

It will be harder and harder for those in the arts and humanities to find permanent or even adjunct jobs in the future. Someone will always be needed to teach the English language. It is not so clear that we as a society will conclude that we need a clarinet or double bass teacher at all major state universities in the country. While I think the live experience of classical music is the *only* way to really get it, it is evident that most of society doesn't agree, and thus in the future it is likely there will be fewer professional orchestras; and thus maybe less of a demand for musicians.

To place this in some perspective, most schools of music only came into existence in the 60's, and many orchestras started at the same time only with the major support of the Ford Foundation. Then again, most business schools were founded after World War II, with universities seeing returning GIs as a good source of income. For that matter Beethoven never went to a conservatory, Michelangelo didn't get an M.F.A, Einstein missed out on a Ph.D., and Bill Gates and Paul Allen dropped out of college—and they all did pretty well in their respective fields.

So while I consider a university experience important, it should never be seen as a necessary step to make one's mark on the world. If it is important it must be for other reasons.

Where does this leave you, the graduating arts or humanities student with a Ph.D., D.M.A, or M.F.A?

If you are so lucky as to land a spot in higher education, it is like having found a nice ledge for the night while climbing a mountain. Put up your tent, count your blessings, and think about what you will do when the sun comes up. Which is to say think about your future, and remember that the mountain is not a foe but doesn't care about the safety of the climber. What will and should keep you going are numerous aspects of your journey.

You may want to get someplace and say some important things along the way. Do so, and always make it one of your top priorities. Forget about the notion of publish or perish. Publish and produce because it is central to your being, or else find another line of work, as you will find yourself spiritually empty at the end of your journey.

You can expect to find a few really good students along the way, and no more; thus limit your expectations—you will be much happier. Do the very best you can because it will make you feel great, and because it will help you reach those students who just might wake up as to why they are at the university, and more importantly, as to why they are alive.

This brings me to a small question. How *do* we bring meaning to our, and our students', lives? This was Victor Frankl's question in his momentous book *Man's Search for Meaning* written after his experiences in the German death camps. It is not a polite question to raise on campus these days. Too bad. It is your job to raise it, and at every kind of meeting and in the many interactions in which you will find yourself.

I have learned a few lessons from my limited exposure to economics—there are tradeoffs to be had; not everyone can have everything and certainly not all at the same time. If a professor offers a course in the sociological implications of Scooby-Doo, then there might not be the money to pay another professor to teach a subject of more serious consequence. But with that we hit the politically correct wall. How can you have the audacity to suggest that one area of study might be more important than another? The answer is that it must be done, as you know that judgment matters and not all judgments are equal. You should quietly and calmly decide if you are ready to make your positions known, because it is *a*, if the not *the*, central issue in academe.

You can take your time at the start and be rather more circumspect in articulating your positions. But sooner or later, to sustain your own sense of self-worth and to be able to look at yourself in the mirror, you will need to make your views known. And guess what? You will discover that you have

more fellow travelers than you thought. You will not be in the majority, but you will be a righteous minority.

While free speech is being suppressed, and a vapid groupthink is widespread on most campuses, we do not live in a totalitarian regime, and we can make ourselves heard without fear of being sent to a concentration camp or the gulag. It is incumbent on you when in academe to use your God-given and constitutional freedoms to make yourself heard—vigorously, rationally, and forthrightly.

Come join us in a valiant effort. It is not for everyone, but if it is truly what you want and must do, you could find no greater satisfaction in any other endeavor. In your calling, you will be a light unto the world.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 6

FRONT AND CENTER: THE PLACE FOR WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC IN THE CURRICULUM

Music in the academy is at risk. The decline in its status, presence, and reach can be traced to the cultural shifts beginning in the 1960s. Western classical music—with its unassailable history of accomplishment and undeniable pedagogical, cultural, and spiritual significance—has fallen prey to the assault on standards and hierarchies embodied by the era's ethos of: "Hey-hey, ho-ho, Western culture has got to go." The result has been disastrous for educative practice and norms. Indeed, we cannot even talk about music, but are forced in this time to speak about "musics." The term is redolent with the patina of critical theory. I use it here only to differentiate between Western classical music and all of the rest, including folk music, popular music, electro-acoustic music, music of other cultures, and all hybrids. We must describe and confront the issue of both the hierarchical and the latitudinal in the musical arts. In other words, we must look at music as it is found around what Thomas Friedman calls the "flattened world" of postmodernism, where all music—from low to high, popular to classical, entertainment to art—is placed on the same aesthetic plane. We must articulate this very broad landscape of music and only then can we understand the academy's response to the present situation.

A discussion of music in the academy must first start with a definition of "music" itself. But as we are now in a postmodern age, music as we knew it and defined it previously may no longer obtain. To those in the academy, or those recently trained within it, the old meanings and materials often no longer apply. This is similar to the problem with the term "art." Only 150 years ago both terms had commonly understood meanings which required no discussion. The situation changed with the advent of modernism, then postmodernism, and with the parabolic rate of change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was not always this complicated. Before the 1960s, in various sectors—certainly in academia, but also in the press and among

the elites—there was a certain unanimity about what was of cultural value. In the American academy, classical music, which meant music in the tradition of European extraction or provenance, was favored. At the same time, it lived amid American folk music and music found in churches and synagogues. The arrival of various immigrant groups brought their popular and artistic cultures to these shores. Nonetheless, there was an agreed upon center.

Until the advent and cultural dislocations of the 1960s and 70s, music education in universities meant a study and performance of Western music. There were courses in theory, history, and music appreciation. Students played in bands, orchestras, and chamber music. Musical experiences were either hands-on or ears-on and were of a straightforward sort. In the 1940s and 1950s, with the return of GIs from the wars and their entrance into higher education, virtually every music department in every state university transformed into a School of Music. Institutions that formerly only gave PhDs in musicology, music history and theory, were suddenly awarding the new D.M.A. (Doctor of Musical Arts) in abundance. For example, the cadre of composers with whom I studied composition had a mixture of degrees, PhD, M.M., and the two most famous only had B.M. degrees. Many of the greatest composers had no degrees at all yet managed well in their chosen profession.

The reasons for this central place of classical music in the academy are numerous. Music had been identified by the Greeks as one the most important means of understanding ourselves and our relationship to the universe. Along with Astronomy, Arithmetic, and Geometry, Music formed the Quadrivium, that second level of intellectual inquiry that came after the Trivium (which included Logic, Rhetoric, and Grammar). In medieval times, when the West recaptured the art of learning, music was considered at the center of the educational enterprise, as it demonstrated the development of mankind's deepest imaginative possibilities.

As notation became ever clearer, and in association with the technological developments of instruments, music became both more individual and more sophisticated, developing from the monophonic to the crowning achievement of Western Music: polyphony and harmony. Music became more sophisticated as a language, able to engender increasingly richer and more personal statements, to inspire and reveal genius. It is no exaggeration to say that each composer, knowingly or not, stood on the shoulders of previous generations. The increasingly complex notation reflected the ethos of the West, the increasing importance placed on the

individual and his personal autonomy, resulting in a continual change of the language. With this, and an increasing awareness of history, a canon comprised of the best composers and their best pieces developed. The "three Bs"—Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms—are sometimes referenced to as such in a discussion of our greatest composers, not because it was an early form of the rock group the Bee Gees, but because they really are superlative composers whose highly individual music has stood the test of time.

Although not always held in the highest of regard at its time of composition, the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms forms the very core of the Western musical tradition. As Charles Murray notes in his book *Human Accomplishment* (2004), "the expert opinion that lies behind the inventories [his word for canonical materials] does indeed represent the view of the late 20C, and it will not be immutable, but there is no reason to think that fashion has deformed the broad patterns that form the basis for discussion." Of course, many besides the three Bs came before and after them, defining their eras and becoming part of the canon. Mozart and Haydn, in addition to Beethoven, defined the Classical period; Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, and Wagner along with Brahms were the major figures of the Romantic period, as Mahler, Stravinsky, and Debussy were of the early Modernist period. As the noted biographer and composer Jan Swafford mentions in his *Language of the Spirit* (2017), common wisdom concerning what comprises a canonical work is just that—common wisdom. Namely, a canonical work is deemed such because it has been acclaimed over a long period of time by experts and the general population. This does not mean that the common wisdom regarding the canon cannot be altered, but that it must be acknowledged and reckoned with forthrightly.

A change in the definition of music, and our understanding of the very stuff that makes music, began with Varèse, a French then American composer of the early half of the twentieth century, who preferred to call music "organized sound." This came at the time of the advent of electro-acoustic music that was either made of recorded sounds or electronic sources. The rules then changed with John Cage's "realization" that music is really all about things happening in time, and music is just that: anything—a sound, a gesture, an action—that occurs in time. Thus, his famous piece "4' 33"" consists of a pianist sitting at a piano but playing nothing for that duration. However, as Roger Scruton has written, this Duchampian joke works only once, and it has turned out to be thin gruel for the human spirit. While many composers find this "music" inherently boring, they nonetheless remain fascinated by the "idea," and find a certain liberation from the actual sound of a work in favor of the concept behind it.

Conceptualism presented a similar experience in the art world of the 1960s and 70s, when texts replaced objects. The result in the musical domain has been the flattening of aesthetic judgment, the injection of politics into music by its creators and practitioners, and a general confusion about what makes great music.

Another important change came with the advent of the field of Ethnomusicology, which found its way into the European educational system in the nineteenth century and into the American educational landscape during the twentieth. This field, a "science" founded in Germany, is Western to its core, as no other culture so assiduously explores in a systematic manner the music of cultures other than its own. Moreover, Western classical music has always drawn from other cultures. The influence of Turkish music is found in that of Mozart and Beethoven. Closer to our time, one can mention the influence of: the gamelan on the music of Debussy, who heard this Indonesian ensemble at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition; Hungarian folk music on Bartok and Kodaly; American folk music on Copland; the Jewish cantorial tradition on Bernstein; or the influence of African drumming on the music of Steve Reich and Indian music on that of Philip Glass. However, a principal value of ethnomusicology is that no music is better than any other, as each expresses an important cultural value, and fills an important role in any and every culture. Its essential problem is that it is unwilling to judge any culture's music relative value qua music. It used to focus on the study of the high art music of other cultures, but it is now the home of all other "musics" whether folk, popular, or music indigenous to various regions or minorities (e.g. Appalachian, Blue Grass, Hip-hop, Klezmer, etc.)

As cultural critic Terry Teachout of the *Wall Street Journal* has noted, America is now, and maybe always was, a place primarily of popular culture. From Tin Pan Alley to Hollywood, radio to television, popular culture has been at the center of America's self-understanding and identity. But high art music has always held a revered place in America's heart and mind. The history of classical music in the nineteenth century was mostly centered in the east coast cities (many cities in the west were just developing), and it was mostly supported and enjoyed by those of the financial and intellectual elite (see Douglas Shadle's 2015 book on *Orchestrating the Nation* for a revealing history of this period). But there were also concerts for the masses, as exemplified by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who from its beginnings included room for the *hoi polloi* to attend concerts at the cost of a pittance.

But it is fair to say that in the main classical music was somewhat exclusive. This was altered in the early part of the twentieth century with the increase in the number of orchestras and the increased pace of development of an American classical music, exemplified in the two streams of musical composition: the Dvorak/Ives path, using indigenous music as source materials mostly within classical forms and shapes, or the Copland/ Bernstein path of Americanizing the European tradition within clearly narrative and pre-existent structures. There was a middle-brow moment in the 1950s when it seemed that high culture and classical music might find a home in mainstream America. This was after all the time of the NBC orchestra and Leonard Bernstein's Omnibus series on the then incipient medium of television. Before that, on radio, renowned maestro Arturo Toscanini conducted his famed Symphony of the Air. University students had recordings of the pianist Glenn Gould, the *Bach Goldberg Variations* being a particular favorite. In other words, art music was taken seriously and was part of the broader cultural conversation. American culture's ambition to aim higher than popular music was recognized for its merit. It involved a recognition that those works which we call masterpieces are called that because, as Teachout says, "they really are better." A masterpiece is also the best of a particular composer. Whereas there are extraordinarily gifted performers in many high cultures, and ones who improvise at an incredibly high level, there are almost no composers of other cultures who stand out as individuals as in the West.

The flattening of the musical landscape—that is, the desire to put all music on the same plane in terms of quality and significance—can also be found with the breakout of popular music, most notably jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues, into the mainstream of popular culture in the 1950s and 60s. It then continued with the world music of Africa and reggae, which arrived in the 1970s. The musical polymath Gunther Schuller stated, "I don't care what category music belongs to; I only care whether it is good or bad." Leonard Bernstein is reported to have said the same. They held that a creative artist must call on all those musical experiences in his life that have true meaning and that they all must come to play in his musical creation. Schuller also maintained that all classical and vernacular traditions are worthy of our support and interest: "All musics are created equal," and it "is a global concept which allows the world's musics... to come together, to learn from one another, to reflect human diversity and pluralism." What he does not explain is how one can learn about or master all of these different musical genres, or whether any one should be held above others. It is precisely differences of style and quality in particular composers that

produce those great works, or masterpieces. Maybe I am misreading Schuller, and he assumes that the great artist absorbs various materials from all musical styles and then forges his own individual identity. However, Schuller's own Third Stream music, which was meant to bring together his two great loves, jazz and classical music, was a failure, as the two genres seem to be antithetical in nature, perhaps with the sole exception of the oeuvre of George Gershwin, who brought jazz elements into the narrative nature of classical music. In the latter part of his life, Schuller found Minimal Music as exemplified by Steve Reich and Philip Glass so pernicious that he refused to program it at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's famed Tanglewood New Music Festival, of which he was the director. It is therefore clear that at some point he concluded all music is not equal. Indeed, all music is *not* "equal," inasmuch as only Western music partakes of harmony and polyphony.

Western music developed differently from most other cultures in a number of astonishing ways. First came the creation of a sophisticated notation that allowed the writing down of musical ideas. In most cultures music is passed down orally from master to apprentice. Second is what Charles Murray calls a meta-invention, an idea which extends the intellectual landscape in a manner that provides for new vistas of discovery and creativity. This is the idea of polyphony, that one can have two lines sounding simultaneously but that work together. This then leads to the creation of harmony, or the organized sounding of pitches at the same time. These phenomena are found almost exclusively in Western music and allow for an unparalleled range of emotional breadth. Also mentioned by Charles Murray is the prizing of the individual personality and artistic voice. This set the stage for the creation of works of the deepest emotional content, and for what we have called in our culture "masterpieces."

What has all of this meant for music in the academy? With the decimation of the core curriculum, students *en masse* are no longer asked, or even encouraged, to experience the great creations of the Western world. Non-music majors have rarely heard the names of Beethoven or Bernstein and it is probable that they have not ever heard a piece of music by these composers. It is now unlikely that they will ever experience the music of the canon or even that around its edges, and they will never engage the new and exciting music of living composers that will speak directly to them. Why is this so?

A panoply of music courses is now offered for "general education" credit, which is a set of distributional guidelines and courses which have

replaced what used to be the core curriculum. Students are offered courses such as: Rock and American Popular Music, Jazz History, Music in World Cultures, Survey of Mexican Folk Music, Arab and Asian Music. In this mix, a course in the introduction to Western music is offered as well. What is the result? Most students will take the course in rock, as that is what they have imbibed from childhood, as background music for cartoons to the finest shows on television, to soundtracks for most movies, to what is presented in the mall and in most university bookstore environs, and in almost every restaurant.

A generation ago faculty were conversant with the string quartets of Beethoven; now those who teach our students know only about the latest and newest "band." Students who take a History of Rock course will be presented a music that has a history of no more than seventy-five years, a little more if you include its antecedents. Its musical content is mostly trivial since its materials are always of the most basic, and formally or architecturally simplistic, as the most prominent form is a simple ABA song form. Although rock may be fleetingly emotionally engaging, it does not achieve deep artistic meaning for the mature mind. It is performance driven and generally lacks composers of sophistication. It provides no change in how one perceives it over the years. Almost universally, the lyrics that accompany it, that are central to what it is, are in the end banal. This is music that makes its strongest impact in the gland-driven years of adolescence. It used to be something outgrown when individuals became adults; now it is the "soundtrack of our lives." Since rock music is so intellectually barren and technically thin, it is by default taught from an ethnomusicological or anthropological perspective. This course, and others like it, has no place in a college curriculum.

Jazz has a history of about 150 years and is certainly more sophisticated than most rock. Its primary practitioners are composer/performers and improvisation is central to its being. I grew up playing and studying jazz as well as classical music, and loved its spirit, energy, and sense of immediacy. I still think some of the work of Dizzy, Miles, Trane, Bird, Monk, Armstrong and others is wonderful. But as I grew older I became disenchanted. Why? The greatest of improvisers will often go dry. An improvisation is just that, something thought up on the spot. If you could improvise as Bach wrote, which is to say from beginning to end, seemingly without stopping, then the improvisor's" result could be as good as Bach's. If one can channel or hook up to that divine spirit in either mode, then the result could be equally wonderful. And sometimes, but very, very rarely, it is. The problem as I see it is that much improvisation has become terribly cliché-ridden.

Architecture is another issue. Jazz form is to play the head (the opening tune), improvise, and finish with the head. It is another form of ABA structure, and it almost never deviates from this, and thus true development is almost impossible; it is structurally inert and thus tedious. It is about creating in the moment, finding the idea, or riffing off the idea. A work is in the perpetual present, rarely able to link to the past or future. It is about the process of creation and not the formation of something significant after that creation has occurred. It is always concerned with process and less about the finished product. It uses the unconscious but rarely the conscious. There is no opportunity to edit out the tediousness that appears when creating on the fly. Having said this, jazz uses the materials of Western classical music in combination with materials found in the Black American tradition, whose musical soul was simultaneously formed of both the African legacy and the American experience. It is not to be ignored. Nevertheless, its study should come only after that of the classical tradition, as it is very much an off-shoot thereof.

The Western/American classical music tradition is approximately 2000 years old. It has developed, altered, changed, and most importantly progressed, in a significant manner over that time. Like all of the Western arts, it presents a historical picture of our civilization's development and change. It has produced styles that are numerous and quite different from each other. They reflect the changing understanding of ourselves. The development of its language allowed ever greater individual expression, and for the emergence of those greatest of composers whose masterpieces signify the highest in human achievement. Their labors reach to the beyond, the infinite, the ineffable, and should not be ignored or missed by any sentient person.

So herein lies the rub. If most in the academy believe or function as if the world were purely material, or as if the human mind and spirit can seek only the mundane and trivial, then there is no reason to search for what is best in man, and we will find ourselves where we currently are: all "musics" are of equal value, meaning, and depth, and we do not even try to suggest otherwise. When the student brazenly asks, "You like Beethoven and I like Lady Gaga. So what's the problem?" and the professorial answer is, "Of course you are right, darling, and please pardon me for suggesting otherwise," you have a good idea of just how far we have sunk into the mire and how far we have to go to raise ourselves out of it. Our job in academia is to remind the student and the wider culture that one of the pinnacles of human achievement is the Western classical music tradition. Its riches are unmatched. Its current practitioners speak to our deepest selves.

Roger Scruton argues that music is a metaphor for our human lives: both have a beginning, a middle, and an end. All great pieces remind us of this. Their *ideas* present the listener with a complete sonic and emotional journey expressed with an internal logic and an external aural intelligibility. The music of the Western/ American tradition must be at the center of every college's curriculum and every student should confront its beauty and bear witness to its magnificence.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 7

SACRED MUSIC: THE HOLY MINIMALISTS AND JAMES PRIMOSCH

From the beginning of human existence, art and music were part of the group or tribe. The people, or the cult, worked together to survive, and observed certain ceremonies and rites of passage. The rituals practiced were religious, as this was the overarching way of approaching the mysteries of the cosmos and the mystery of human existence: birth, life, and death.

Roger Scruton, the philosopher, writes that death "shows us the natural origins of the experience of the sacred," for this primal mystery underlies our wonderment. It is therefore no surprise that in our culture, which idolizes youth, and hardly recognizes the occurrence of death, that it is rare to find music that strives for the sacred, or to help us enter the transcendental realm.

Such music in the West has existed in almost all musical periods, some in which it predominated, and some in which it was subservient to the religious domain. After the Enlightenment, music certainly separated from the realm of the sacred, became more about the individual than the community, and yet took over the goal of creating the vestige of a sacred experience. In our time of disbelief, of the diminution of the notions of sacred space and time, is it possible to produce music that pushes toward the transcendent, and helps us realize it as a possibility?

The latter part of the twentieth century saw the emergence of what Terry Teachout called Holy Minimalism. Or rather this was the title given to the music of composers, including John Tavener, Henryk Górecki, and Arvo Pärt. They were (Tavener and Górecki are no longer with us), or are (Pärt is 80), religious believers of one religious orthodoxy—Christian to be sure—or another. While much of their music is religious, it is a music that is primarily meant for performance in the concert hall and not in a sacred space.

Their music came on the scene with a splash, purveying a resurgent tonality and other aspects of the musical tradition, including melody, counterpoint, and normative orchestrations, including for the orchestra. Of their differences, Teachout wrote:

> Pärt uses the word 'tintinnabulation,' a term meant to evoke the bell-like repetition of chordal tones typical of his mature style. Górecki's more conventional array of compositional techniques includes both elaborate counterpoint and the ritualistic repetition of melodic fragments and harmonic patterns. Tavener's music relies primarily on the deployment of florid, chant-derived melodies over static chordal backdrops.

In their music, there is also clear reference to their forebears: the Stravinsky of *Symphony of Psalms* and the *Mass*; Britten, whose name is in a title of a work by Pärt, and particularly, in the case of Górecki, to plainchant. If there is one other composer around whom all of these composers orbit, it is assuredly Olivier Messiaen.

The teacher of Boulez and Stockhausen, Messiaen was a devout Catholic who wrote music aiming towards the experience of divinity. Thus much of his music is static, even when full of energy, as it aims to be the music of an ecstatic in the presence of the Holy. His displays of birdsong call to the relationship of the natural world as a creation of God: wondrous, but subservient. His forms are usually cyclic or arch-like, suggesting the possibility of infinite repetition or of continually staying in the same place, producing a formal stasis.

Messiaen and the latter day musical saints all have a defined and personal musical language, and this is both their salvation and curse. The quality of a simple human joy is infrequently found, and with Tavener's and Pärt's music in particular, a certain tedium frequently sets in — the language is just not up to sustaining its musical and religious goals, however fervent in intent the composer may be. Górecki may end up being a one-piece composer — not a terrible thing, by the way — as his Symphony No. 3, *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, is wonderfully evocative, if emotionally limited. Messiaen's music is always in a holy space, and even in his lighter birdsong moments, it is hard to find moments of true humanity. The best music traverses the space of both the sacred and the profane, and so also the widest panoply of human experience and emotion.

And what of now, and in America? In the time of Lady Gaga, techno, metal, etc., sacred music, or music aiming for a sacred space—and not a new-age sacred space—is not a burgeoning field. One who is in it, and doing very fine work, is James Primosch. This is nowhere so clear as in his recent disc, appropriately titled *Sacred Songs*.

The four works presented are on sacred and high literary texts, including Rilke, St. Bernard, Prudentius, Psalms, and Stewart for a start, sung wonderfully by William Sharp and Susan Narucki-in English, Latin, and German. Like the languages used, the music is eclectic, as there are many influences: plainchant, expressionism and folk songs are a few. Yet this is an integrated eclecticism, where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, and all is formed into a *widely* (this is important) expressive language, one that has a basis in tonal relationships, but that can be abundantly clear or mysterious.

It is hard for some composers to know when to stop or be quiet, but Primosch gauges that well in these works. The pacing is elegant, movements are never too long or over stay their material, and the balancing of movements is delicate and done with assurance. The music, unlike the Holy Minimalists, doesn't strive always to be in a holy space, but instead to describe it and give it a human response. In this way Primosch is able to take us to, be in the presence of, and then take us out of, sacred time and space, an attribute which is at the center of the Western musical art form. For example, *Dark the Star*, on beguiling texts by Susan Steward, is a bit of an askew palindrome, and at twenty-two minutes passes swiftly but with the sense of a journey taken that is of note and meaning, finding sacred space and then retreating from it. The other works are similarly well judged in their pacing and emotive reach.

Christopher Kendall's *20th Century Consort* brings out the glistening textures and rapid fire alterations of orchestration. This is a modified Pierrot Lunaire orchestration (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, voice), and Primosch does wonders with it. At times savagely thick, at others wispy, delicate, almost desiccated, it is always in the service, and supportive, of the texts.

John Harbison, whose cantata *The Flight Into Egypt* is an earlier and wonderful sacred work, wrote the linear notes, which are movingly informative and insightful. "The music sounds like it intends to be remembered. Motives are felt, rather than just being useful. Quiet static

moments are driven home, not just waiting for something to happen." He is right. As Hillel might have said, the rest is commentary, now go listen.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 8

STEINBECK, SONTAG, AND BOULEZ

For anyone who follows the *Wall Street Journal's* Terry Teachout's "dramatic" wanderings throughout America, it is known that theatre is thriving throughout this land. This is certainly true in Tucson, AZ.

The Arizona Theatre Company has recently put on a compelling run of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. George, played by Jonathan Wainwright, is wiry and full of barely contained energy. Lennie, played by Scott Greer, was appropriately disheveled, manic yet contained, and innocently, if murderously, simple. Crooks and Candy, the nigger and old fart respectively, were played with a subtle richness of humanity by Chike Johnson and James Pickering respectively. The supporting cast was equally exceptional. Occasionally a few of Steinbeck's characters, such as Curly and his wife, are underdeveloped. But even these thin roles were handled with panache. The staging could be described as modernist cowboy, with clean and lean lines. The play reminds just how strong Steinbeck can be.

Steinbeck forces us into a review of the problem of the treatment of the mentally ill and, for that matter, euthanasia. On the same day that I saw the show a disturbed man in Seattle sat in a very high tree for the day, unwilling to come down. The event and show certainly brings to bear on the question of how to deal humanely with the mentally disturbed. George killed Lennie so that his demise, which was sure to come, would be less grisly. How we confront the problem of mental illness now seems caught in delusional politics where freedom seems to trump humane care for those who can't take care of themselves. At least George 'oversaw' and looked out for Lennie. Is there anyone who really looks out for our mentally disturbed? Shouldn't they be placed in institutions where they can actually be taken care of—R.D. Laing and Erving Goffman notwithstanding?

Lennie is shot by George at the conclusion of the play before the posse of men led by Curly can find and shoot him themselves. In this version the last image seen is that of Lennie splayed in a small stream of water which formerly connoted life. Perhaps the reference is also to the river into which

Lennie leaped in another and earlier time at George's suggestion, a demonstration of Lennie's gullibility and George's wiliness. The audience burst into a standing ovation at the end. I found that troubling, still reeling from the emotional shock of Lenny's death, and the emotionally distraught state of George, having had to do the deed of killing his best friend. How does one shed that shock to the system so quickly?

I arrived home in a state of excitement and agitation, not unusual for me following attendance at a wonderful artistic performance. I turned on the TV, as is sometimes my want, to help me chill out, and was confronted with the scenes of wanton Islamist terrorist murder in Belgium and President Obama doing the tango in Argentina. I wondered if there wasn't a connection of events, namely a difficulty with empathy, or the inability to sustain or confront emotion, whether of that created by art or that found in real life.

Having enough, I turned to the *Bourne Identity*, which seems to play perpetually, just moving from station to station and time to time. Its gratuitous violence is overwhelming but also alluring. As the heroine got sick over one of the many killings, I got sick of myself for watching what I have seen too many times. As I turned the TV off, I thought of Susan Sontag. In an interview she is asked by her interlocutor if she doesn't occasionally desire to turn on the TV. She pauses, smiles, pauses again, and then says something like the following: No, I really don't. I know you find this hard to believe, but let me say it again—I don't have any desire to watch TV. [Which was to say, she had lost her taste for popular culture.] And by the way, I wish some of my earlier essays [One can assume she is referring to *Notes on Camp*, et al.] would just fade away. I was young and foolish when I wrote them.

Which finally led me to think of another among the recently dead, Pierre Boulez. Enough has probably been written about him for me not to pile on. His career as a composer was ultimately small and thin, as he had a hard time, like Lenny (Bernstein, that is) it would seem, actually sitting down and finishing pieces. Also, his music is remarkably unmemorable, although in his piano works he very occasionally makes a quiet statement that has some emotional depth. Sadly he didn't take his teacher Messiaen's dictum to heart, that "melody is supreme," as this is a category in which his music is notably lacking.

Like Sontag, he was brash in his youth, taking off and bashing many of his previous compositional betters, most notably Schoenberg. He then

ended up conducting the music of those same composers in his illustrious performing career. Was this his way of saying "I was wrong," and thus there was no need for a written or verbal apology? Perhaps. Or was he constitutionally incapable of saying he might have been wrong? At least Sontag had the decency to do just that, even with her backsliding and caveats.

Neither Boulez nor Sontag proved nearly as successful as creators as they did at re-creation in the case of Boulez, or talking about others and their creation, like Sontag's *On Photography*. Steinbeck's artistic achievement, in its emotionally clear and direct approach, holds up.

PART ONE: CHAPTER 9

SUMMERTIME MUSICAL MUSINGS I: GEORGE HAAS

It is summertime. That suggests reading during down times, and even some cleaning up-late since this should have taken place in spring. But maybe spring cleaning is meant to be of the physical kind (as for Passover) whereas that which takes place in summer is to be mental.

In any event, I have been cleaning files off my computer and desk, trying to make sense of what remains, and circling back to materials I saved so I could comment on them after a certain gestation period. I wanted to make sure my responses would be reasoned and less emotive, as the materials initially provoked a strong negative response.

I have always thought that great music is a category unto itself. Should one care if the composer is a little green Martian, of either or no sexuality; a horse on an exceptional course of steroids; or a true-blue anti-Semite (like Wagner)? I come down on the side that says a composer may be outside of my understanding, a true bastard as it were, but that the music must be judged in and of itself. Thus, I love the Ring and detest the moral attributes of the man who wrote it.

Now, when we come to matters of sexuality or animals (let us not combine the two please), I would make a similar comment. I really don't care if one is straight, gay, bi, or any other of the current designations of sexual categories. I will stand on the judgement of the music as music which must be undertaken by the listener or critic. The artist too is always judging, at every moment consciously or sub-consciously, assessing the rightness of every move. Of the thousands of possibilities, he must choose the right one; and upon reflection, retain the initial opinion or reject it. All other considerations are not worthy.

So do we really need to know the intimate details of a composer's sexuality, and how much of this needs to be displayed publicly?

In a *New York Times* article of February 23, 2016, penned by Zachary Wolfe, we are regaled with the sex life of composer George Haas. His music is apparently more buoyant and upbeat now that he has found love with his submissive but feminist Negro wife Ms. Williams-Haas. "The most important step," he said, "was to accept, yes, I want to be dominant. Yes, I love to play with pain." Is this really what we need to know in making an evaluative listening to his music? Is it helpful, or is it just smarmy? Does it in any way enlighten us about the music, which is apparently also political. Susan Boynton, chairwoman of the Columbia music department, where Hass now teaches, said she saw no cause for concern. "People might be more interested because they'll realize he's such a multifaceted person," she said. Really? One's sexuality is now what makes one multi-faceted in academe? I thought academe would welcome rich and deep opinions predicated on wide and deep knowledge, or aesthetically rich creative work. But now it would seem that diversity is desirable in that world in regards to all of life's nooks and crannies. Maybe we will find that Haas, like Wagner, is an anti-Semite and we can welcome this "multifaceted" aspect of his personality as well. Or maybe he likes Chinese food, prefers black to brown shoes, or likes a Cab over a Merlot. The possibilities are excitingly endless.

Part One: Chapter 10

Summertime Musical Musings II: Laurie Anderson

I have of late not been gentle to Laurie Anderson, as I find most of her music to be banal, superficial, politically simple-minded, and musically vacuous. Thus it comes as no surprise she is now writing music for dogs.

I have long had dogs as have many of my friends. They are wonderful creatures and companions. They reciprocate our affection and keep us company; make us aware of the simple nature of joy; perhaps even bring meaning to some human lives. But ultimately—and here is the rub—they don't and can't provide an intimate I-Thou relationship. No matter how much we wish to anthropomorphize them, they are not human. And while animals can make sounds, they cannot make or understand music, particularly as a source of pleasure or of meaning.

Music—that is more than just random Cageian sound—is a human made language for humans to understand music's own nature and to understand our sense of a transcendental relationship to the world and maybe more. This is an aspect—some argue the fundamental aspect—of what makes us human.

So Ms. Anderson wrote a piece for dogs first performed outside of the Sydney Opera House. (Did this location give it some particular privilege? If a porcupine burped in the same location would its emission also have special significance?) It is in a very low frequency band since this is the range in which dogs can best hear. About the performance she said, "At the end, they began to bark—even the droolers in the front row. "It was a beautiful sound," she said. "They barked for five minutes. That was one of the happiest moments of my life." Music is, of course, supposed to have expressive meaning and signify something of moment. This piece sounds to be as expressive as thunder.

I am also delighted that some artists love their pets—seemingly a lot. Ms. Laurie Anderson has recently released a movie about her dog Lolabelle,

a rat terrier who died in 2010. Her husband Lou Reed died in 2013, and the film is dedicated to him.

The *New York Times* tells us that "Heart of a Dog," is about seventy-five minutes long and, with dreamlike fluidity, tackles a wide range of themes: mortality, love, art, and even post-9/11 surveillance." Note the last category, which could have just as easily been about 9/11 mortality/carnage. I guess it isn't because, much like her breakout piece *Oh Superman*, every plane is an American plane wreaking carnage (who were piloting those 9/11 planes?). Apparently there are no other evil forces in the world, and certainly none worse than America. But why bring up silly things, like beheadings in far off lands, when we are just talking about our pet and surveillance?

A final question: did Anderson privilege one over the other—that is, her dog and husband? In response to Dennis Prager's question to kids: " If you are in a boat with your dog and a stranger and the boat were to sink, whom would you save?" most kids answer that they would save their dog. Poor Lou, it is not at all clear where he would have found himself if he were with his wife and dog in a leaky boat.

Part One: Chapter 11

Summertime Musical Musings III: Sheep and Opera

Summer is over, so it is time to get serous and talk about sheep and opera.

In Euro-spheric opera, nudity is in, sado-masochism the norm, fidelity to the libretto out, opposition to any bourgeois norms *de rigueur*, and allegiance to the new-age sense of irony always present, if expressed laconically. Everyone and everything is "iconic," or at the very least, "a little masterpiece." In a Post-Cagian world, every little sound—even the tiniest passing of wind, if listened to "correctly"—is music or art.

I digress, but, only a little. So back to sheep. Or first let us talk of elephants and horses. Opera has always included at least a little spectacle, or a lot. It historically included dance, that physical art which combines grace and athleticism. Sometimes the athleticism verged on the realm of spectacle with gymnastics of a kind included as well. But dance was always supported by music, hopefully of a high quality. Horses and elephants, or even baboons for that matter, only add visual spectacle, an icing on the musical cake as it were (but hopefully the cake is a tasty one). The participation of said animals is always to create a sense of heightened realism, and any sounds the animals make, or additions they make to the stage scenery, either by their presence or droppings, adds nothing to the overall event. In fact, they are to be avoided.

(Many years ago I saw a parade in Seattle, part of its Mardi Gras-like week that took place every summer. There were many horse groups participating and each had a poop-picker-upper behind to clean the street. The first walked, the second was on a bike, the third on a scooter, and the fourth—-drove a very cool yellow Lamborghini!)

Which brings us back to sheep; in fact, many sheep. It was reported in a *New York Times* article of March 25, 2016 that "The scene-stealers in question are the 100 sheep that appear in an eerie, endearing section near the end of Heiner Goebbels's dreamlike staging of Louis Andriessen's 'De

Materie,' a Dutch avant-garde work from 1988 . . . " To which there is a report from a *Times* critic that "their occasional bleating lent a lovely natural touch to the score." For some reason I can't help but think of the beans around the campfire scene in *Blazing Saddles*, as that is natural too, but just a tad outside of the realm of high art (not to be confused with *High Anxiety*, let alone *The Age of High Anxiety)*.

But no matter, now sheep bleatings are artistic statements. Can they really be the subject of critical response? Does one sheep bleat better than another? Is there a basso profundo among the herd, or a coloratura, of stellar quality?

The article then discusses finding a farmer with sheep who wishes to have them in an opera (what if one sheep decides she wants an agent, God forbid!), how to house and feed them, and other sundry items. Then comes a fun find.

"There is no indication of sheep in Mr. Andriessen's score, which was first staged by Robert Wilson in 1989. The Armory production, which originated at the Ruhrtriennale in Germany in 2014, is directed by Mr. Goebbels, who said that he had decided to use the sheep as part of his effort to "build a space onstage in which the imagination of the audience can take place." "I'm not interested in circus, and taming, and animals doing things that they were not meant to do," he said, describing his first meeting with the original woolly interpreters at a rehearsal in Germany as one of the most beautiful moments in his life as a director. "I just wanted animals to do what they do. It's very poetic, and unpredictable. You never know what they're doing next."

Ah, it is "poetic" and one just doesn't know what the critters are "doing next." How do sheep make a space for the listener's imagination better than an empty stage? Art usually comprises a little skill and craft, let alone a real idea. All of these are in absentia in Mr. Goebbels thinking. Or are we back to Happenings in the Armory, an idea that I would suggest, or hope, we have now outgrown. Like Duchamp's urinal, once encountered, on the second time around it is a trifle dull, not to say just a bit stupid.

By the way, what are the financial and legal implications of having sheep on stage? Do they get choristers' wages, or are they paid by the bleat? Are they unionized? Has OSHA approved their waiting-pen? Might not a sheep fall off the stage? Are they sufficiently diverse, as there don't appear to be any sheep of color in the picture of the flock?

As summer is now over let's get back to serious matters. Time is short and there is much to be done. Halloween is just around the corner and thus it is almost time to bring out those wool sweaters for the cool nights. Damn, I knew those sheep would come in handy somehow!

Part One: Chapter 12

Breath in a Ram's Horn: Why Classical Music is Like Jewish Prayer

I have long been interested in pondering why it is that the Jewish people have had, and I hope will continue to have, such a strong relationship to classical music. As Jews approach the Days of Awe, in which countless hours are spent in the synagogue, much of it in singing or listening to singing, it is a good time to explore this question.

While Judaism is many things, including a peoplehood and a culture, it is most importantly, a religion, a belief system. At the center of this belief system is the desire to approach the one God. Living with God is achieved through many avenues, first in belief, in the following of the *mitzvot*, in the study of Torah in its largest sense, and certainly in praise of God. Like Judaism, it seems to me that classical music is another system that allows us to approach and praise God; perhaps it is one of the most important pathways to God.

Jews now approach God through the activity of prayer. But prayer wasn't always the form in which praise or communication with the godly occurred. In the times of the Temples, this praise occurred in the form of sacrifice, and music.

It is clear from many of the psalms that music was at the center of the Jews' approach to God. Whether it took the form of ecstatic praise, as suggested in Psalm 150, or through the simple but firm utterance of the shofar, music represented a simple and direct pathway to the Holy One. In more recent times, the Hasidic movement has used music, in particular, the *niggun*, as another direct way to approach God. Perhaps music, the artful combination of sound and silence in time, is a form of prayer without words.

An understanding of Jewish prayer suggests that at the center of this enterprise is a celebration of the mystery of the world and the universe. To

approach God and God's creation is, in Abraham Joshua Heschel's term, to approach all that is, with a sense of "radical amazement." Music and prayer are really both metaphors then for understanding and experiencing our lives in relationship to the mystery of the universe, and our relationship to the Creator.

Music is one of the most direct means of approaching the universe on this basis. It, like prayer, leads us directly through and beyond our logical processes, to an encounter with the ineffable. As the noted composer, Ralph Shapey, said, "A great work of Art is a work which transcends the immediate moment into a world of Infinity; complete and infinite within itself; of inevitability and of Oneness." Shapey is suggesting that the musical work, as an object, tries to resemble, to imitate, the very nature of God. The result for Shapey, is that music is a form of religious communication, "because for me, yes, great art is a miracle. I'm talking about an experience in which, for that moment, you are in a different time-element, a different sphere. You receive something so marvelous you can't define it." Music, like prayer, lets us enter into the realm of miracles, to approach the mystery of the universe.

Both Judaism and music find space and things to be subservient to time. Abraham Joshua Heschel has written, "Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time. The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments. Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms of time, as architecture of time." Music, and classical music in particular, is about the sculpting of time into significant forms, into grand architectural works extended in time. Its building blocks are sound and silence. Its reason for being is to provide us with sacred moments, inklings of the Other, in what is, for the most part, a profane world. Like prayer, like the practice of the Shabbat, music allows us to find, and experience, sacred moments in time.

So now, we might ask, what is the relationship between the experience of revelation and that of imagination? Maybe it is simply that revelation is used in a religious context, and imagination is used in a musical, artistic or secular one. As Rabbi Ira Stone has written in his "Seeking the Path to Life," "Imagination is the bridge between God and humans. It is not the locus of fiction, but the locus of truth. God speaks to us through the imagination." If this is so, then surely God "speaks" to composers of the greatest imagination. Surely, when artists are "in the zone," they are closer to the divine spirit. They are crossing that bridge that separates God and humans.

For anyone interested in engaging the sacred, it only makes sense to "listen" to what they have heard.

The Days of Awe are all about turning, and returning, to the better. That includes using our time better, looking for the sacred in the world. I hope that you will include the realm of the great classical works in your search in the coming year.

Part Two

Music I (Mostly) Hold Dear

Part Two: Introduction

A close friend has been after me to write about twentieth century music that I like. This comes after my dismissal of much of the music of Cage and Carter which has caused just a little consternation in the new music world. As I am not unrelentingly negative about many works of the latter part of the twentieth century, I have decided to make a stab at honoring my colleague's request.

I have written in other venues (see *Academic Questions*) of my great admiration for some of the music of Aaron Copland, particularly his three great piano masterpieces. But to talk of such a composer and his music is to talk about someone who is already acknowledged within the pantheon of great composers. I will take it as my task to write about composers, or at least a piece or two of theirs, that I admire, where matters are less settled. This process will be undertaken episodically and in no particular order. But my considerations have taken place over about a 40-year period and thus have had time to weather and change. Some of my former loves haven't held up, while other works seem to have increased in their power to move me. Those that now, or still, matter seem to fall within certain guiding principles.

For me, any piece of music worth its salt has to be about an idea. We know what that means with Mozart and Beethoven so I assume we can figure this out with our peers. If I retain something of a piece in my memory that's not a bad thing either, to paraphrase George Rochberg. And most really good pieces, as Schuller has said, should deal with all musical parameters at once. The pieces I mention will have a high degree of craft, contain large amounts of emotional content, tell me something that matters about the composer and his understanding of the world, be individual or personal, original and usually idiosyncratic and partake of that most elusive quality: genius.

I take as my starting point 1945-50 only because of the cultural break caused by the WWII; not because I believe the modernist premise that music had to start afresh at that time, for that is a belief that suggests the past is not part of our present if only we wish it so. This is an idea that negates the lives and music of those whose careers and music began before the war and

continued long after the war. It is the early Boulezian idea that there is only one path of musical history that is righteous and right, an idea that is totalitarian to its roots. Then again, I also find the post-modern pervasive permissiveness to be equally pernicious.

I am inclusive and open to much within the parameters as noted above. However, I do not find all musics to be equal in their possibility for depth of expression, and thus I don't include what will become obvious. I withhold the right to discriminate—to make judgements—and thus to conclude that some music is more worthy of our attention than others. I also hold the view that we have no composers whose total output is as astounding as some composers of the past, while this does not negate their contribution of a number of great pieces, as it is those pieces that will mark our time. To give a more nuanced and rounded picture I will also make allusions to some of these pieces deficits and why I think other pieces of the composer's oeuvre are not worthy of our attention. Lastly, while my choices are my own, and thus personal and idiosyncratic, I do justify my choices with reasons that suggest my choices are not arbitrary. You may, of course, reject my choices and my reasons. I will look forward to hearing your responses accompanied by your reasons and justifications, as questions of Beauty do not quite have the concrete nature of matters of Truth and Goodness.

I also have no problem with the matter of taste. While those who love Wagner may not dote on Brahms, it is hard for those in either camp not to acknowledge the strengths or veracity of the other composer. Some find it in their hearts to love both. But then again, these composers have been well vetted over the course of time.

The music world is a tough one for composers, leaving very few standing at the end. That is just the way it is, as sustained genius doesn't come around all that often. I should also add that sometimes great pieces happen at a very young age (e.g. Mozart, although he was getting much more personal and rich at the end), and sometimes it just takes longer for a composer to hit his stride (e.g. Janacek, who really began hitting his stride in his 60s).

Lastly, I will write both for the professional musician as well as the interested lay person, thus the language is rarely technical. Those interested may consider this a useful survey of evocative music of the last half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, and can seek out recordings for their listening pleasure and edification.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 1

GYÖRGY LIGETI

I admire György Ligeti's stance and music. A survivor of both the Holocaust and Communism, he wasn't about to fall for the totalitarianism of the postwar European avant-garde. His musical offerings are always unique and personal. While an initial admirer of his Piano Concerto and Violin Concerto, I now find these pieces don't hold enough true material that seems to matter.

A piece that still retains its luster is his *Kammerkonzert*. With its allusive textures, it's clarity of structure, not to mention it's dramatic contours, the piece works on many levels. The absence of harmonic motion or stasis, one of those things that it is all about, works well. Its larger structure is satisfying, with speed/time changes in each movement clearly delineated; the internal structure in each movement is sharp and well-paced, and the materials never outstay their welcome. I still find it a tremendously satisfying work, much more effective than other pieces of the same era, such as *Atmospheres, Lontano, Ramifications* which are, finally, pedantic and dull.

The small and short stage works *Adventures* and *Nouvelle Adventures* are lusty, bravura and, well, adventurous. They become somewhat irritating because of their tortuous (oh yes, I know he wanted them to be this way, but even so ?) vocal parts, which finally just become a bore. *Le Grande Macabre*, an opera, after it's marvelously fun multiple car horn opening, is dull and tedious, musically filled with existential ennui as the text suggests, but ultimately as boring as Penderecki's *The Devils of Loudon*, another nihilistic piece of around the same time.

I admire Ligeti's desire to keep learning and changing in the course of his career, to move beyond the known and the comfortable. While a few of the piano Etudes, which preoccupied him at the end of his life, are exquisitely beautiful, most are dull and tedious as they overly downplay certain musical parameters to emphasize others (usually rhythm presides over pitch), but the trade doesn't make for a successful compromise. Many

of them also partake of Ligeti's love of speed, one of those clichés of the twentieth century; while it may provide for virtuosity perhaps never heard before, it is an empty and often meaningless one. The few that are worthy of attention include *Etude 2: Cordes a vide* and *Etude 5: Arc-en-ciel*, as they are full of imagination in all musical domains. By the way, I don't think it coincidental that they are the only two etudes of either Book I or II that are marked "espressivo."

Every great composer also must have a strong style even if it changes over the process of maturation. Some of Ligeti's stylistic traits are so simple however that they seem separated from something of real meaning—they become mannerisms. I am thinking of such traits as the music seemingly going either above or beyond where the keyboard actually stops; the separation of the aggregate (all twelve chromatic pitches) into two parts, one in each hand, that results in a neutral and dull playing field of pitch; his writing of dynamics that are only imaginary such as six p's or seven f's; and clusters, meticulously written out, which are of course impossible to play at the speed asked for. Nevertheless, among the European avant-garde of the postwar generation, Ligeti has the clearest and most finally honed sonic imagination.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 2

STEVE REICH

For my graduate recital at Hampshire College in 1975, I included two works of Steve Reich, *Clapping Music* (performed with Chris Young, who went on to make it big in Hollywood) and *Music for Pieces of Wood*. I traveled from Amherst to Manhattan to talk to Reich about the works. I remember nothing of our discussion about his music, but I do remember the meticulous nature of his downtown loft—it was spotless, the floors and walls gleaming, everything in its place; his music is not dissimilar.

When I got to New York a few years later, his fortunes had already improved quite a bit, and I decided to catch up with what he was currently doing. When an advertisement was plastered on the wall of some abandoned building for the performance of the first part of a new piece, I decided to attend and ended up in a walk-up loft, where we all sat on the floor. Thus I ended up at the premiere of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, his largest and most accomplished piece to date. I, like everyone, was mesmerized. The chugging patterns chugged along, the interlocking parts worked like machine-work, the modal landscape was bright and glistening, and—oh!—those bass clarinets moving in and away from the microphone on a low eight note articulated drone. It was a moment of revelation. (It was even good enough for John Adams to steal for the string basses in *Shaker Loops*.) I had not heard anything quite so cool before. The piece still holds up well to a hard listen.

Latter pieces don't work as well for me, with many of the smaller pieces sounding like outtakes from something larger. The problem is one of riding a particular idea ad nauseam; like with Albers' series of colored squares, once you have heard a couple, you don't need—or want—to hear them all. Some find *Different Trains* to be an extraordinary piece; I don't, as its Mickey Mouse matching of text and rhythm is banal, and the harmony just too static, criticisms that apply to the "operas" as well. The large orchestra pieces don't work at all, because, like Glass, Reich has no feel for orchestration, for color or weight, or for the creation of different timbral strata; oddly, these concepts seem foreign to his musical personality. A later

piece like the *Triple Quartet* is simply dreadful, with harmonic motion attempted but unsuccessful, and the density of texture creates an opaque and gray sound wall rather than something to relish; but a composer is allowed his *Wellington's Victory*.

I will think fondly of those early works in which there is the freshness of discovery, not the latter works that were done seemingly either for financial gain (of course, not a bad thing in and of itself) or just to knock the next piece out.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 3

PHILLIP GLASS

I became aware of Philip Glass's music in 1975 when Ron Perera at Smith College introduced me to *Music in Fifths*. I thought it intriguing. While studying at Yale a few years later, Philip came up to New Haven at the invitation of the Art School (not the music school of course). He played some of his *Knee* music, the joining movements of *Einstein on the Beach*. As no other composers attended, after the presentation he and I hung out, and he told me of the travails of working with untrained singers in downtown New York who couldn't read or count too well. He asked if I would like to join them and do the tour to Europe to introduce *Einstein*. After thinking it over I declined, deciding I was better off sticking to writing my own music, and after graduating I moved to New York City to seek fame and fortune.

Soon after I got to town *Einstein* hit the city with its performance at the Met. It was, of course, a sensation. I missed the event but followed Philip's progress and sooner or later got to listen to *Einstein*. I still consider it a seminal piece, probably some of the best work that he has done. While I still haven't the patience to sit through it in its entirety, I find parts of it absolutely mesmerizing. Having said this, it may be that the individual layers of music in and of themselves just don't hold all that much content. But there is indeed something about the confluence of all of the layers that is satisfying if not completely enriching. And here is the problem—the texts do not, and are not meant to, make sense. In fact the totality is not meant to make "sense." It lies somewhere in the world of dreams, and these dreams, rather than revealing some deep truth, lead us instead to the realm of the original version of . . . whatever.

In fact this may, in a way, be the first and ultimate Valley Girl opera, feigning sophistication, but being pretty empty. Which is to say that the collaborators really have nothing to say, say it very well, but leave it up to the viewer to make sense of it. Years later, after its revised performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, critic Samuel Lipman tried again to make

sense of it as an artistic object and as a phenomenon. I think he is on to something when he says:

> As music heard apart from the stage spectacle . . . Glass's score seems not only harmless but even appealing, as if it were quite content to function as a sentimental pop anodyne; heard in the visual context of Wilson's shameless exploitation of contemporary anomie, the music takes on a character no more musically impressive, but vastly more evocative of a certain kind of cultural despair.

Glass has, however, written well for his ensemble, that amplified quasi-rock band heavy on keyboards and winds.

I am less sanguine about work thereafter and after he became Philip Glass, Inc. As the music came, endlessly and in reams, it just didn't develop much. A solo piano recital was a superficial joke with each piece being exactly the same except for the number of repetitions of various measures; the chord changes in each piece were exactly the same. I couldn't make it past an act of *Akhnaten*; the vocal lines are a dreadful bore and the orchestration is intolerably sophomoric. I feel similarly about *Satyagraha* and works then up to the *Concerto for Two Timpani* (which includes a complete rip off of the *Mission Impossible* Theme—Philip should be paying part of his royalty to its composer Lalo Schifrin). I have occasionally dipped into the latter symphonies which I find phlegmatic for the reasons already mentioned.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 4

TORU TAKEMITSU

Toru Takemitsu never wrote an ugly sound in his life (well maybe in his film music, but I speak here about his "art music"). Animated throughout his career by nature, many of his works carry titles relating to water or trees. This is so of two of his most beautiful works, *Water Ways* and *Rainspell*.

Waterways is written for the wondrous combination of violin, cello, clarinet, piano, two vibraphones and two harps. I imagine the first four instruments mentioned like the body, and the two groups of vib/harp and vib/harp like the wings, of a butterfly. The piece is weightless, without a feeling of metered time (most of it is in a spatial or a quasi-spatial notation), created in a series of balanced episodes, with a recycling of squishy motivic material that is less a process of variation than different views of it's almost non-corporeality. Tonality is a present force, but always lies somewhere in the background, its magnetism weak, like a remnant of the Big Bang. The music hovers more than it moves, is gently wafted by air currents rather than moving steadfastly down a track towards any arrival. It feels goal-less, just happy to be. While a climax always appears—and oh yes, somewhere around the Golden Mean—it always comes as a surprise. Instruments are like actors with each getting its turn for a soliloquy, and then are matched together for duets, trios, etc. An instrument's entrance is held back for dramatic effect, the arrival of its timbre fresh and provocative. The highly differentiated sections balance each other, creating a sense of repose. At the climax, all the parts head off on their own, like rivulets, only to end up in the sea of A major, intoning the brightness of a sunrise (or a sunset), and then evanescing into a gleaming afterglow. It is a piece that ravishes with its timbral beauty.

Rainspell, for flutes (both concert and alto played by one player), clarinet, vibraphone, harp (with quarter tone tunings), and piano, seems to emulate various patterns of rain, sometimes with a random quality, or just before the climax, with the pitter patter of a light storm. The climax, like with Water ways, in which the instruments all head off on their own paths in a fury of overlapping repetitive patters like many dust ghosts, has a

tumultuousness that exceeds the usual for this composer. It is grounded in low octave B-flats played fortissimo in the piano, the loudest and heaviest moment in the work. By the way, this tonality has been heard before, and thus at the climax it is not heard so much as an arrival as an affirmation of something already known, a practice Takemitsu uses frequently. The other tonal area expressed is D, a third away. The piece essentially rocks between these two areas.

Both works express Takemitsu's fascination with the music of Japan (see November Steps), the philosophy behind it, and the sound world and practices of the West, particularly the Post WWII European Avant Garde, and then increasingly through his life, the music of the French, particularly Debussy and secondarily Messiaen. His larger output has a certain sameness; his individual works lack a high profile or a stamp of individuality. His greatest failing, one he acknowledged, is his inability to write music of speed, of energy, namely, an allegro, for want of a better word. Thus, he rarely wrote multi-movement works displaying a range of emotional breadth or large scale architecture. His personality and his language just don't allow it.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 5

EARLE BROWN AND MORTON FELDMAN

Of the perhaps inappropriately named New York School, I find Earle Brown's the most musically rich and articulate. *Sign Sounds* is for a small chamber orchestra. Brown's structural ideas are intriguing as always, presenting materials to be shaped by the conductor in performance. His open-form concept, an important aspect of this piece, is revolutionary in the best sense of that word. In this work certain cells used in repetition create a certain mantra, a possibility always inherent in Earle's music. But here there is a plasticity that is downright luscious. The percussion parts sound like a million bucks as they glisten and swirl. His working out of these ideas over the years, and the memorable ideas in this piece (if conducted appropriately) make it one of his most charming.

I also find that his *String Quartet*, an early piece, contains fine moments of whimsy and humor, not something one associates with the avant-garde of the fifties and sixties. The textures are novel and the sounds haunting. Browne's harmonic palette allows for the gritty and glowing. In another work, *Windsor Jambs*, there is even a section of harmonies inspired by Messiaen.

By the way, there is nothing aleatoric or of chance in these pieces, and in fact these ideas didn't appeal to him. As he said about Cage's use of chance:

> Often, such singlemindedness results in self-repetition. I hate to say it, but I think John rode the chance horse for about thirty years, which no longer makes it an avant-garde idea. But he was so hooked on it.

About Feldman he also had interesting things to say:

> I asked him once why he was writing these four-hour quartets, and he says, "It's a career move." He was very conscious of painters, and career, and being a success; he really wanted it, without making any bones about it.

I prefer shorter pieces of Feldman like *I met Heine on the Rue Furstenberg*, *Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety*, and his greatest

work, *Rothko Chapel*—pieces that require neither the performers nor the audience to be catheterized. This last piece should be performed much more frequently, but alas, like Ligeti's Lux Aeternae, it is a difficult piece for a chorus to learn and sing.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 6

ROBERT BEASER

Robert Beaser is one of our very strongest composers. For full disclosure, let me say that I have known Beaser since our student days at the Yale School of Music in the 1970s and we were co-music directors of the New York contemporary music ensemble Musical Elements almost from its inception (for the record, Bob joined up in the second year) until we gracefully bowed out of the scene in the 1990's. We remain friends.

I will make the following categorical statement about Beaser's music—there is not a note that doesn't need to be there and there is an inevitability present that is overpowering. His penchant for the fine act of development and variation is always present. Large scale architecture and a sense of pacing is unfailingly well done; the forward ride, while always having clarity, allows for and encourages surprises.

But I leave the best for last—Beaser's pieces always SING, and of course I am not just speaking about those pieces that involve a singer and words. His music, like all the very best, combines body and soul. His rhythm partakes of the vernacular (like Bernstein or Copland) but raises its potential and possibilities which is of course what a fine composer does, like Hayden and Mozart did with the Minuet or Bach with the gigue. His materials are always strong and memorable and he is one of the best orchestrators we have. His integration of American folk music is not a contrivance but rather a stepping off point for controlled riffs on well-known materials (e.g. *Mountain Songs*). If I must make a criticism it would only be that sometimes his orchestrations are so beautiful they verge on being too sweet, just a tad over the top, like putting honey on top of a rich dark chocolate sauce—but then some make the same comment of the music of Messiaen, so perhaps this is more a matter of taste than critical judgement.

But this facility and all others is always put to the best service, as in his orchestral works including *Piano Concerto*, *Song of the Bells*, *Double Chorus*, and his magisterial *Guitar Concerto* (try orchestrating around a guitar!). These pieces glisten and reward numerous hearings. Let me

mention a few other pieces to fill out the picture. The early *Seven Deadly Sins*, written for the witty and debonaire tenor Paul Sperry, is emotionally deep, vocally riveting, and harmonically rich; and the tunes are catchy as hell without being maudlin or treacly. These same qualities are found in the cycle *Songs from the Occasions*, but this music is even richer and more personal. The *Four Dickinson* Songs of 2002 are lean and mean, the harmonic vocabulary more streamlined than ever before, mirroring Dickinson's prim and exceedingly direct New England personality and language. All of these vocal works display Beaser's sensitivity to setting texts just right. Through his partnership with Eliot Fisk he has also made a major and lasting contribution to the guitar repertoire with pieces like *Notes on a Southern Sky* and the aforementioned *Mountain Songs*. Lastly, this guy was writing killer works at an early age. His *String Quartet* and woodwind quintet *Shadow and Light* were written in his early twenties and are virtually unknown. They display his early modernist stance, sizzle with youthful energy and pizazz, and deserve to be resurrected. Where is the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center when you need them?

PART TWO: CHAPTER 7

JOHN ADAMS

John Adams is one of the most frequently performed of American composers and justly so.

Shaker Loops continues to hold its allure. In its well-handled diatonic materials, bravura approach to rhythm, units cycling through overlapping rhythmic loops, and its stretching of time and romantic accelerandi which have the force of a railroad engine, this is music that is both visceral and intellectual. It is also not completely simple nor purely elemental. He adds a new technique clearly picked up in the electroacoustic music studio, a quasi-filtering process applied to registral filling in or deletion, that separates this minimalist work from those of his then mentors, Reich, Glass, and Riley. The work is not without blemish. Its slow movement, that suggests the undulating and desultory nature of water, grows tedious. The materials are somewhat unformed and anodyne, but it is saved by its classical structure—the climax comes right at the Golden Mean providing architectural clarity. The fourth and final movement has similar issues.

The trickster element in John's personality comes through best in his *Chamber Symphony*, which sounds like Ives on uppers. It is witty, rambunctious, and beguiling. Like *Shake Loops* it succeeds less well in its slow movement, as writing a true melody is an issue. John's *Book of Alleged Dances* is equally witty and humorous.

I find the settings of Whitman in *The Wound-dresser* to be among his very best vocal writing as his laconic baritone lines are deeply poignant and have just the right American gait. The orchestral accompaniment is never obtrusive but is also never dull, a very fine and tricky path to walk.

I agree with Richard Taruskin's assessment that works like *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *El Nino* are superficial in comparison, and morally and religiously problematic. Other earlier works like *Nixon in China* and *Harmonium* now leave me weary as their machine-gun like rhythms feel like Shoenberg's Pierrot drilling into the pate of my skull.

Among his more recent work is the three movement *Dr. Atomic Symphony*, a reduction from the opera by the eponymous name. The first movement, *In the Laboratory*, is portentous but finally melodramatic. The second, *Panic*, is a wide and deep canvas of music that is fraught, taught, and overly wrought. It is visually graphic and has certain qualities that refer to *Shaker Loops* in its virtuoso string writing. Its ability to sustain angst is impressive but finally a bit dull. A long horn solo is panoramic but is devoid of musical heft. There is much wind and string filler that occupies, but doesn't extend, dramatic time. The third movement, *Trinity*, is too sectional and straightforward in its motoric quality which finally just sounds forced. A trumpet tune lacks profile and the return to simplistic minimalist chugging at the end is crass and unworthy.

A setting of the John Donne poem, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," sung by J. Robert Oppenheimer in the opera Doctor Atomic, is considered by many to be a highpoint of the opera. I can't agree, as its churning orchestral interludes sound just adolescently petulant and the faux Purcellian vocal line doesn't turn into true melody as it so desperately seeks to do. Ned Rorem suggests that a composer should never repeat text unless the poet does so. While I am not so doctrinaire, in this case, the repetition of text puts the work over the top and into the realm of melodrama.

Adams has done much better than this opera and its orchestral Cliffs Notes version, and I am sure will do so in the future. In this regard, I look forward to hearing his new saxophone concerto *an Outlier* written for the remarkable Timothy McAllister, as Adams remains one of our great hopes.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 8

FREDERIC RZEWSKI

Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never be Defeated* is one of those pieces that seems to have popped or plopped out whole and near perfect. While now I find it just a bit longwinded, it still works in its proportions and rigorous variation structure.

The work is a set of 36 variations based on the Chilean song "El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!" by Sergio Ortega and Quilapayún. The variations are relatively short, in six groups of six, with each more elaborate than the previous. The variation structure is as tight as a drum and the only weak spots are where this process breaks down. This occurs in the silly minimalist variation that goes on way, and I mean way, too long, and the placement of a cadenza after the thirty-sixth variation and just before the reprise, which subverts the entire enterprise if actually taken by the performer. But I am sure that is what tickles Rzewski no end. My guess is that he felt almost a political necessity to "break free" of the restraints he had set for himself, to be subversive of his own created structure.

The work unites various sound worlds effortlessly, including the tonal and atonal; the virtuosic and the experimental; and it thrives on its wide emotional spectrum. It also presents an unbridled and un-apologetic romanticism, an aspect which I find attractive and refreshing.

The piece retains a simple but deep nostalgic charm. This assumes, of course, that one can put the underlying political stance at a distance. This I do with Wagner (a composer whom Rzewski studied no less) whose music I love but whose politics, as expressed in his writings, I detest. Here the case is just a bit different as I detest much of Rzewski's other music, like *Attica*, *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, or *De Profundis*, not because these works aren't musically of interest, but because with them Rzewski shows that he is the Leni Reifenstahl of the contemporary music world.

This is agitprop that is vulgar, simplistic, and finally, pornographic in its political expression. Composers enter this world of the musical-political

at their peril, as music works in aesthetic terrain with ease—it is its natural home—and the political realm much less so.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 9

JOHN CORIGLIANO AND DAVID DEL TREDICI

Discussions regarding the relationship between musical persona and sexuality are mostly wrongheaded, dumb, and beside the point. If the music is superb it doesn't matter if a transgender giraffe, homosexual zebra, or a very straight lama wrote it. Why should one care if it is a lesbian or gay, as opposed to a straight man or woman who prefers coffee to tea, who writes a great work? In regards to how music qua music is to be evaluated it shouldn't, and doesn't, matter in the least.

I say this as some might question this pairing of two gay men, John Corigliano and David Del Tredici, the former rather circumspect and the latter more public about his orientation. I do so not because they are both gay but because there is something similar about their musical profiles. I will leave it to others for whom this might matter to parse the supposed influence of their sexuality.

Both men, who are in their mid-70s, have written large quantities of delightful music. Corigliano has written numerous dramatic, and well-conceived and received, concerti (for flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, and violin), a grand opera, song cycles, and symphonies. Del Tredici's imagination seems to be most animated by the combination of words and music and thus a very large part of his output includes the voice. What they have in common is that they both write music of a highly charged and theatrical nature, music that doesn't stop until it is, or close to, over the top.

They write wonderfully for the orchestra, which is to say not only do they have a natural ability for it—my guess is either you do or you don't—but they obviously work hard at it as well. Corigliano and Del Tredici have made it one of their primary avenues of expression and this repertoire is far richer as a result.

They are interested in the orchestral medium for a number of reasons. The large modern orchestra can play really loud and really soft, and both composers exploit this dynamic bandwidth. Del Tredici pushes the envelope even further in a work like *Final Alice*, for example, by amplifying the

soprano soloist and adding a section of folk instruments and saxophones to an already large orchestra. Corigliano, in *Three Hallucinations* from the movie Altered States, includes scoring for a large percussion section and an organ.

Their color palettes are highly varied and almost perfumed. There are never clumsy sounds. Rather, each sound invariably glistens. These composers delight in the orchestra's many sonic combinations and treat it as a vast reservoir of sensuous possibilities.

This is not to say that this is the primary feature of their music (like early Pendercki), because for music to make an immediate impact, as well as to survive for the long haul, it must have strong, perceivable, and memorable content. The music of these gentlemen has this in spades. From their earlier works-Corigliano's *Piano Concerto* and *Violin Sonata*, and Del Tredici's *Syzygy* and *I hear an Army*, it is clear that these composers were capable of finding strong ideas and taking them on a fine journey to a satisfying conclusion. They had the strongest of musical personas and identities right from the start. As they matured, their respective languages developed and deepened significantly while, surprisingly, proceeding in opposite directions.

Corigliano started off as an extended-tonalist in the American symphonic camp probably as the result of growing up at the feet of Leonard Bernstein. (Corigliano's father was the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic when it was under the direction of this conductor among others.) The early music displays a neo-classic rhythmic vitality and jauntiness, warm and lyrical melodies, and a penchant for sweet extended harmonies. Over the years his music has become eclectic, inclusive of broader technical and aesthetic possibilities. The resultant works, like *Three Hallucinations* and his blockbuster hit *Symphony No. 1*, could be called poly-stylistic, as they include polymorphous textures, quotations of older music, aleatoric effects, and a mixture of tonal and non-tonal materials. They are less direct than what came before but more emotionally expansive and nuanced.

Recent works like *The Red Violin*, a concerto developed from his music for the eponymous film, and *Mr. Tambourine Man*, an orchestral song cycle based on poetry of Bob Dylan, show him still developing his refined sense of lyricism and drama. The former is a bravura work in the lineage of Beethoven's Violin Concerto (it is all about scales, arpeggios, passage work, and a few very good tunes), and the latter is as direct and clear as the early pieces but carries greater emotional weight.

Del Tredici moved famously in the ‘70s in the opposite direction, from the serial camp to unabashed tonality. This was largely dictated by his infatuation with the story of *Alice in Wonderland* and its wider literary penumbra (associated stories and commentary) which seemed to require a simpler and more straightforward language. In writing works on these texts he mentions that he first wrote what was decidedly tonal music, always expecting to go back and put in the “wrong” notes, but finally concluded it just didn’t make sense to do so. He took a figurative beating from many of his colleagues for this apostasy, but audiences ate it up. *Final Alice* is the most famous of the Alice pieces, and Del Tredici calls it an “opera in concert form.” It can be described as multiple variations on a simple tune whose ascending major sixth (as in “My bonnie”) is so ubiquitous that it drives the listener just a little bit crazy, but this obsessiveness is at the center of the experience and is ultimately winning in its peculiar and off-kilter way.

In more recent song cycles like *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter* and *Chana’s Story* he continues to plumb the possibilities of a post-Romantic tonal language that is able to contain, hold, and—here is the kicker—integrate, references to late Romantic, Impressionist, and lounge-lizard, music. In the vocal parts he employs a vast range, repeats words and small phrases with abandon, employs Wagnerian crescendos and pitch trajectories (like the whoop of the Valkyries!) and single note recitatives. The piano parts are busy with elaborate figuration and virtuosity—these are no fragile accompaniments but rather present a full-fledged, if occasionally overbearing, partner.

David Del Tredici and John Corigliano did not become different composers with the change or expansion of their materials. Just as Stravinsky showed us that a composer could talk in different languages and still retain immediate identifiability and individuality, so is this the case here. A good example is Del Tredici’s compression and expansion of time that carries from *Szyrgy* to *Final Alice* (usually an exponential process carried out in both directions); his heavy orchestrations that are layered with a thickness that is like impasto on a canvas; and the emotional quality of frenzied exhilaration. While with Corigliano it is the frequent presence of a finely wrought tune of a wistful nature, a looking forward and backward in musical time almost in the same glance, the fast or languidly slow move from the gentle to the barbaric, and the affect always clear and right on the surface.

These two composers have matured in a delightful way from their auspicious beginnings. Their oeuvres are worth encountering.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 10

ROBERT DICK

In tribute to Robert Dick on being awarded the National Flute Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, August 2014.

I first met Robert Dick—flutist, composer, improviser—when starting my graduate work at the Yale School of Music. He had finished up already but was very much in the mix of the musical scene. We became friends through similar musical interests, musical exploration, a desire to bridge the gap between high (new art music) and vernacular music (jazz, pop, and the blues), and a shared excitement brought to ping pong, which we would play for hours.

Robert gradually introduced me to the new language of extended techniques he was creating for the flute and I was intrigued and entranced by its possibilities. He was not only writing works for himself in the tradition of Paganini, but seeking out composers who wished to write for his extraordinary capabilities. Among those who signed up for the challenge from the neighborhood were Bruce MacCombie, Cindy McTee, and Robert Morris. I wrote him *Plum-DS II* (the *DS* stands for *Dream Sequence*, the first having been for solo amplified trombone). Robert ended up playing it extensively, in this country and abroad, and recorded it (in Europe on Attacca-Babel 9158-1; in the States on Summit Records Solos DCD-442), all for which I am still most grateful. He took friendship and musical quality equally seriously.

Dick has remained fixed on his initial goals and vision throughout his long and fruitful career. He has revolutionized the language of the flute, codified it in his seminal treatise *The Other Flute*, and brought it to artistic fruition in his own fine compositions.

Afterlight, the early seminal piece of 1973 (GM 2013), combines the sensuousness and luminosity of Debussy's *Syrinx* with the insistence of Varese's *Density 21.5*, while introducing and solidifying his new vocabulary. This includes multi-phonics (the sounding of more than one note at a time), whistle-tones (just what it sounds like), glissandi (like what

strings are capable of doing-sliding from note to note), microtones (those tones between the cracks of the usual ones), percussive key clicks (a whole world of them, rather than just the few in the aforementioned Varese composition), and more generally, a vast array of complex sounds. The work still sounds fresh and alive and remains a fine introduction to his musical world.

Meristem, written for the Asia/Beaser directed New York new music ensemble Musical Elements in the eighties, is for flute and seven instruments. It is an excellent example of the extension of Dick's lexicography to other instruments. He presented a revised version just a short while ago in Pittsburgh.

Dick has from the beginning been involved in bringing together new music, avant-garde jazz and world music, in particular through his strong interest in the cross-over work of Jimi Hendrix and explorations of the flute in other cultures. He has pursued this genre bending via his partnerships with the Soldier Quartet, New Winds, King Chubby, and other performers such as Steve Lacy, Bobby Naughton, John Zorn, and many others.

These influences and partnerships result in the great aesthetic success of his discs *Third Stone from the Sun* (New World Records 80435-2, 1993) which includes arrangements of Hendrix tunes by Dave Soldier and Dick, as well as their own music; and the mostly solo disc *Venturi Shadows* (OODiscs #7, 1991). Also in this regard, his long partnership with jazz/new music pianist Ursel Schlicht produced the extraordinary *Photosphere* (Nemu Records 002, 2005)) which contains some of his/their richest compositional and improvisatory work. It is a real "conversation," as he put it, and the two have created singular and vibrant soundscapes.

His most recent work is with the vocalist Thomas Buckner (Mutable Music 17541-2). I hear it as combining sounds of the eastern Pacific Rim languages, with the sputters and mutterings of a deconstructed language associated with early Meredith Monk and Joan la Barbara. It is full of playfulness, wit, and whimsy.

In all these works one hears exploration, the widest gamut of human emotion and expression, great virtuosity, and very much not least, humor. This is a colossal feat.

Dick has also revolutionized the instrument itself. Like one of his early mentors, Arthur Weisberg, he has not been simply willing to accept the instrument as is, but has been finding ways to improve its expressive and

technical potential. These include explorations of new fingering mechanisms, a re-designed bass flute, and the whammy bar Glissando Headjoint that allows note-bending that puts the flute in the mix with Clapton and Hendrix (check out *Sliding Life Blues*).

One of the things I love about Robert is that he pulls no punches and says what needs to be said. There is a major piece of the new flute repertoire by one of our most famous composers which he said he had a hard time finding very interesting (guess what—that is because it really isn't, except in his hands). He eventually recorded it, but only after finding a truthful way to make sense of the work and bring it to a new place of meaning and expressivity. This is no small achievement.

In a time of musical superficiality, triviality, hype, and the omnipresent marketing and purveyance of that which is mostly empty of meaning, Robert Dick—virtuoso flutist, revolutionary pioneer, superb composer, and genius/seer—is the real deal. His efforts will be felt for a very, very long time. So MacArthur Foundation, do what you do best, and follow up this wonderful award by the National Flute Association and lay one of your own on this guy!

Part Two: Chapter 11

Fred Lerdahl String Quartets 1-3

Fred Lerdahl, composer and theorist, has written three string quartets a cycle that are important to the literature for this medium in the twenty-first century. There is a pedagogic nature to the writing, as the pieces teach you what they are about as they go along, and they are written in spiral form, whereby each successive phrase, and quartet, is an elaboration or development on the previous.

The first quartet is introspective, probing, and inquisitive. It begins with the simplest of intervals, as in perfect fifths and major seconds. These intervals gradually become more complex, the density fuller and move to a free chromaticism. The phrases come one after the other generally without a break—they are mostly of a lyrical, if anodyne, nature. The rhythms are episodic, rarely allowing for any sort of build up into anything like momentum. Since the work is mostly introspective, it is also mostly quiet. Like the Bartok quartets, and many others of the latter twentieth century, it exploits the timbral possibilities of the instruments utilizing pizzicatos (the plucking of the strings with the fingers), sul ponticello (a nasal quality achieved by positioning the bow very close to the bridge) and even a striking of the wood of the bow against the strings, all with great frequency. There are stop-on-a-dime quick alternations from the playful to the ruminative, and the use of the widest registral space is axiomatic and prolific. One doesn't hear any long sustained emotive place, but many that follow on top of each other in rapid succession. As the variations grow in size they become more diffuse, even discursive, in organization.

The second quartet is formed of off-balance peripatetic rhythms, thus again there is rarely a sense of flow. The atmosphere is ascerbic, constructed rather than easily formed. It is in two parts or two variations. Each has a quiet introduction, a development, a climax, a scherzo of sorts and a coda. This is emotionally charged music. Phrases don't seem to end as much as to morph into the next affective space. There is not a lot of breathing in this work, but rather a rush of ideas (as a river doesn't breath). There are syrupy

glissandos mixed with sounds of the plucking of the strings. The materials themselves are elusive and hard to grasp.

The third quartet starts with a rush of materials, almost as if it is in mid-phrase, which of course it almost is, as it is a final variation in this ever-expanding spiral of variations. But a twenty plus minute length can't be composed simply of one phrase and thus it is indeed formed of materials of widely differing emotive content, from angry bursts to internal gibberish. It even has the first truly extended section of any of the three quartets, a perpetuo moto of sextuplets, that astonishingly provides the first stable and extended section of the entire cycle, even though it is a whirlwind of notes. It is immensely welcomed, if perhaps a little too late in its arrival. It is proceeded by expressionistic counterpoint, quick alternations of the highest and lowest registers, angular stabs from one instrument that seek to destroy the texture of the others, at which it succeeds. The atmosphere is dark and macabre. The piece finishes with a reversal of the opening chords of the first quartet, a bit of very tidy housekeeping that certainly works to close off the cycle.

The final and third quartet was written almost forty years after the first. It seems a little odd that Lerdahl could enter that same world, thinking it would be fresh and vital, and that his musical and psychological place wouldn't, or shouldn't, be quite different. If the first holds newness and freshness, and the second perhaps a modest extension of the world of the first into new terrain, the third seems a traversal of terrain already plumbed for as much as it can yield.

The entire cycle is self-referential and moves in a Proustian stream of consciousness with reflections upon reflections coming to the surface in it's spoken rhythms and gnarled pitch language. There is not quite enough material, nor that which is sufficiently differentiated, to sustain this architecture of an hour's duration. The lack of harmonic motion, oddly not a part of Lerdahl's language, makes for a certain wandering quality. There are moments of textual simplicity but mostly the music moves with great rapidity and little explanation. But while the work is mystifying, almost arcane—it is never boring!

Part Two: Chapter 12

George Rochberg

I was occasionally in the presence of the wonderful photographer Irving Penn in the 80's. I will never forget a simple statement he made then, "I keep getting better the older I get because I *do* learn more as I go along." While this sounds patently obvious, it is true only if one is open to learning more and willing to push deep in the artistic journey.

There are many composers of the latter half of the twentieth century for whom this is not what has taken place. Instead, like various mathematicians and scientists, they produced something extraordinary at an early age and were incapable or unwilling to move on to richer and deeper artistic places as they matured. Once they found their style, they stuck with it so resolutely that they ended up treading water. This is perhaps because of a shortage of creativity, a marketing choice, or perhaps a failure of nerve.

Those who have willingly braved the gauntlet of change include composers such as Penderecki, Del Tredici, Ligeti, Adams, and Corigliano, to name a few. Penderecki and del Tredici moved from soundmass and serial works to neo-romantic ones. Ligeti moved from folk influenced music, to micropolyphony, to music influenced by minimalism and that of sub-Saharan Africa, and finally, in the Etudes, to all of that and the entire tradition of etudes, as well as jazz and Nancarrow. Adams, in his willingness to sift through the ash heap of music, has moved from his beginnings in minimalism to a strongly maximalist position, absorbing lessons from Jazz, Bruckner, Subotnick, Broadway, cartoon music, Schoenberg, and more. Corigliano moved from an expanded tonal realm in the 60s to an expanded eclecticism thereafter, followed perhaps back to a freer tonal realm in pieces like The Red Violin Concerto. For all of these composers the trick is to retain one's individual voice while altering language, as Stravinsky did, speaking in numerous languages, dialects, or styles, during his long and varied career.

One of the first to have travelled this road, and to whom the previous owe much, was George Rochberg.

Rochberg started off his career in the 1940s-60s as a serialist, producing such gems as the Symphony No. 2 and the chamber work *Serenata d'Estate*. These works demonstrate his control of large forces of the orchestra and the subtlety of small forces; the control of both large and small scale form; and that most important element, the ability to come up with strong, memorable ideas, and develop them over time. Even in this compositional environment, he projected his notion that "Is it really so bad if something in the music stays in the mind?"

In the mid-sixties he made a break with serialism, concluding that the language is ultimately barren of expressive intent, or perhaps put differently, that its expressive possibilities are extremely proscribed. But unlike European composers like Berio, Stockhausen, Ligeti, and others, who continued to write and seek answers within a modernist post-tonal aesthetic, Rochberg looked to the past, and wrote music in the style of Beethoven and Mahler, occasionally borrowed music from other cultures (Japan), while at the same time also writing within a post-tonal lexicon. In *Music for the Magic Theatre* he incorporates the Adagio of a Mozart's Divertimento No. 287, ascribing re-arrangement to the realm of composition (by the way, in so doing, he opened up the possibility for Berio's best movement of *Sinfonia*, the third, which is a riff on a Mahler's Symphony No. 2-Mvt III, or Jacob Druckman's *Prism*).

Rochberg was rejecting the avant-garde notion that everything started anew, and with a complete sense of amnesia, after WWII. Rather his credo was "All human gestures are available to all human beings at any time"; that all great musical works are of the present; they are part of our lived experience. This is a religious notion of history, as in the Jewish notion that when one recites at Passover the words of the emancipation of the Jewish people, those reciting it are experiencing it as if they are now coming out of Egypt, and it is expressed similarly in the Christian term for the Resurrection at Easter, He is Risen, not He has Risen.

But Rochberg did not remain static. In works from the 1980s——*Octet: A Grand Fantasia*, *Oboe Concerto*, and Symphonies No. 5 and 6—he synthesized his wanderings through musical time, forging a personal post-tonal language of immense breadth and expressivity. We appreciate him not only for opening up the musical landscape but also for the rich oeuvre he has left us.

Part Two: Chapter 13

Concertos of Stephen Jaffe, Joan Tower, Stephen Albert, and Christopher Rouse

In this article I discuss a number of wonderful recent concertos. This is not to suggest that the composers of these works haven't written many other meritorious pieces in other genres. I simply want to get their music out to those who are interested in hearing some of the best new classical music around, and *new* in this context means within the last twenty-five years or so. With some of this music I have been waiting a long time to mention it, with others it is in response to a recent CD release, and with some it is because of the very short time that certain music seems to stay in our present consciousness. All of these works are worthy of your attention.

Stephen Jaffe, whose public profile should be much higher, has written a gorgeous Violin Concerto, and it has somewhat recently appeared in a wonderful reading by Gregory Fulkerson and the Odense Symphony Orchestra, with conductor, Donald Palma. Jaffe's music, finely etched with memorable motivic material, is a delight to the ear. Primarily tonal and modal, it also veers off to the boundaries of that terrain before winding its way back. It is both tender and exuberant, often in quick alternating fashion. While this should be jarring, it isn't; instead there is a sense of sure pacing that feels like it can't go wrong, and it doesn't. There are the usual bravura sections which don't sound usual at all, and Fulkerson handles these and everything else the concerto throws at him with clarity and gentle ease. Palma and the orchestra accompany beautifully.

The Cello Concerto by Joan Tower has withstood the test of time. Written in 1984, it is a vivacious eighteen minutes long, divided into three sections with a cadenza. It exhibits those characteristics of much of her music, including some heavy percussion (a palette like that of Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*), driving, brash rhythms, great balance in structure, and an immediacy of material. This work centers on the intervals of the major second and minor third, a trill, and some scale passages. It is a hat made of pretty basic stuff, but wonderful surprises are pulled out of it. Tower uses the orchestra mainly in separate choirs yet isn't loath to use

orchestral tuttis on single lines when warranted. The slow section has some wonderful keening lines, and the delicacy of music in the extreme high register, in its icy isolation, is riveting. The cadenza, much of it in double stops, is mostly quiescent and probing. Harrell, Slatkin, and the St. Louis SO give the work a taut performance.

Stephen Albert, a student of George Rochberg in the 1960s, was a teacher of mine in the 1970's when he was a visiting professor at Smith College and I a student at Hampshire College. Truth be told, he did not much like looking at students' music, so we mostly studied scores together, as I remember, of Bartok and Crumb. After his untimely death in the early nineties both Christopher Rouse and I memorialized him in symphonies we were writing: I in the adagio of my fourth and Rouse in his second. Albert wrote wonderfully communicative music, much of it for the orchestra. You can hear his two symphonies on disc as well as much of his other music. His concerto for violin- *In Concordiam*, and for clarinet—*Wind Canticle*—are superb outings for those instruments. But you might wish to start with the cello concerto, written for, and recorded by, Yo-Yo Ma. It was supposed to be in one movement of fifteen minutes duration but grew into a four movement work of over half an hour. It is well-wrought and beautifully orchestrated. The movements are linked and by the end all of the threads are dandily brought together. Like most of Albert's work, this is soulful music, and Yo-Yo milks it for all it is worth.

Christopher Rouse has most recently been the composer-in-residence for the past few years with the New York Philharmonic. He has written many works for orchestra including symphonies, concertos, and shorter works like *The Infernal Machine* which started it all for him. His Violin Concerto combines his sense of lyricism in elegantly written materials for the violin and his penchant for percussive bombast. The movements are each beautifully shaped and together add up to something more.

The first movement, in three major sections, opens with the solo violin which is joined by other high strings, in a mournful quiescent music, akin to that of the opening of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste*, albeit a bit more tonally centered. It is rudely interrupted by loud minor chords of a Wagnerian heft, aided and abetted by loads of percussion, particularly a deep tamtam and bass drum. (Ned Rorem once said that percussion is used in inverse proportion to its effectiveness, but none of that for Rouse.) A prominent and profound figure appears in the brass that has the shape and quality of the Dies Irae figure, and it is repeated numerous times.

After this section loses steam, a new section comes in, almost a slow, nostalgic waltz, with high figures in the violin. It too is interrupted by the Wagnerian idea; the opening is stated briefly before it fades into the stratosphere, providing less than a conclusion. But that is because it segues neatly into the next section or movement, really fast music with a nice jazz syncopation to it. The rest of the piece contrasts these various materials, introverted, deep and heavy with a Berliozian and Wagnerian overtone to it, and the fast light buzzing music that Rouse does so well. The final cadenzas are a true tour de force, with alternations of bowing and skittering left-hand pizzicato that bring the piece to an abrupt and rousing (ouch!) close.

You won't hear the music of Tower, Albert, or Jaffe much these days. Whether it is conductors who don't know the American repertoire, soloists who don't know what was written when they were born, or artistic administrators' lack of artistic memory, vision, and adventurousness, the current situation is benighted. Being just a decade or two out of the scene can bring a paucity of performances, as can being just a bit reserved or not having had the right break. And then death can bring on an artistic deep freeze, unless you are swept into the updraft of the momentary politically infested zeitgeist. The scene's insistence on being "current" and thus historically amnesic is absurd and artistically bankrupt. Instead it sells mostly trivial, trite, and empty ephemeralities. Go figure.

Part Two: Chapter 14

String Quartets of George Tsontakis, Donald Wheelock, Robert Xavier Rodriguez, and Daniel Godfrey

The String Quartet was initiated by Joseph Haydn. His pieces were written for, and performed by, the educated amateur, often an aristocrat and his friends and family. It was parlor music in the best sense of that phrase. Mozart joined in the fun, and then Beethoven pushed the medium into the professional realm when his works were finally written for a group of professional musicians.

Since then the genre has been one of great attraction to composers, not only because of the presence of many established quartets, but also because of the nature of the medium itself. The composition of the group-four string instruments from highest to lowest allows a composer to engage in the art of musical conversation without the distraction of color. It is thus a fecund environment in which to work out *ideas*.

This has been true in the early part of last century with the creation of the bodies of quartets of Bartok and Shostakovich, as theirs is a rich addition and extension of the repertoire. It is no less true of the latter half of the twentieth century, and in the following I recommend a few works I think worthy of your attention.

Stephen Albert, upon hearing that I was writing string quartets, asked how I had the temerity to do so considering the overbearing presence of Bartok. My response was, "Well, how can you write symphonies after Beethoven and Mahler, or songs after Schubert." The answer of course is that you just do. I should have also said, "Why don't you ask your teacher and mentor, George Rochberg?" who wrote seven of them. Maybe it is time to go back and listen to these, particularly from the third onwards, as this period, the 1970's, and these works, mark his break from serialism and his turn to neo-romanticism. They are passionate and playful, as if the composer

had found a wonderous new/old playground in which to write. In many respects, they are the pioneering foundation for the quartets of the following composers.

George Tsontakis has written six string quartets, the last two recently commissioned and performed by one of my favorite ensembles, The Cypress Quartet. I look forward to hearing these. Even if he doesn't write another, his contribution to the genre has been already been huge. I find his intimate music among his best, and that is so with these quartets. In the third and fourth, he shows a suave sense of melody and his harmonic language is personal and true. The fourth is, it must be said at the outset, a work of religious substance. The text of the hymn is the works title, "Beneath Thy Tenderness of Heart." The first movement quotes the hymn and then weaves subtle variations upon it. The movement does indeed express tenderness, not a quality that is found all that much in twentieth century history. It also displays qualities of affirmation and even purity of spirit, and this is found in its unabashed, and very well handled, mostly tonal universe.

Movement II, marked Scherzo, is less about a joke than about the joyousness of speed and a quick darting free abandon. Yet there are indeed sudden shifts of dynamics and register, and even an obsessiveness of motivic repetition, that provide a droll humor or a slightly charming perversity. Movement III, marked "Postlude-The Madonna Weeps," has long sections that start with a smashed major chord, followed by dissolution into an ambiguous atonal world, marked by clear and articulated chords changing ever so slowly. Above those chords a very high violin softly wails, and then at the phrases' conclusions, trails off into the stratosphere. Through the repetition of this phraseology, time seems to cycle back upon itself, containing the state of transcendent despair.

Donald Wheelock wrote his third and fourth quartets in 1988 and 1992 respectively. In the Ciompi Quartet's empathetic performances of twenty years ago they are revealed as impassioned conversations displaying more of this composer's emotional landscape than he usually reveals. They are finely textured, impassioned, and structurally solid. Here his contrapuntal proclivity comes alive, and there is a pervasive sense of dynamism. The music is intense and emotionally gripping. While sometimes spikey, it is not overly so. The fourth, in one movement, is a tour de force. It combines simplicity and complexity in equal measure, moments of severe intensity followed by lush quiescence, rhythmic vibrancy and placid, cantabile melodies. After a long and chaotic journey, it ends quickly and quietly, like a puff of smoke disappearing. All of this takes place within a harmonic field

of wide inclusiveness, yet tonally grounded, always focused and sharply heard.

Robert Xavier Rodriguez's *Meta 4* (1994) was written for the dance, but it does just fine as an independent concert piece. The title is a nice word play on the pervasive presence of things "4" in the piece: four players, for movements, a theme of four notes . . . you get the idea. The first movement— soliloquy and cannon—starts with a tender melody played in unison that is characterized by wide expressive leaps, a reappearing ornamental figure, mostly placed in a high tessitura that is sometimes searing. The canon is more steady, full and luxuriant, at the end effervescing and leaving hardly a trace. The second movement scherzo—in measures of two beats rather than the usual three—is made up of short pizzicato and motivic bursts, as well as slight tempo changes that provide a tongue-in-cheek effect. The third and fourth movements are again more lyrical, like the first, but of differing natures. The former is made of weaving lines of stepwise motion in its first and third parts, with a much more active rhythmic canon trio as the second part. The latter, a toccata, comes across as a neo-romantic/minimalist hybrid, with steady sixteenth-note motion overlaid with lines of syncopations.

Daniel Godfrey has been writing in a tonal idiom for a long time and it shows. His *String Quartets 2 & 3* are lyrical and lush, contained in a mostly narrative structure, but contain just a dose of whimsy and humor, so they never descend into the mundane or trivial. The pacing is such that the ear can easily trace the transformation of the materials. The sound world is neo-impressionistic, warm and aglow. The Cassats do a lovely job with them.

All of the pieces mentioned above are serious works. They lie firmly within, and extend, the tradition. None are ironic and neither do they pander. They require concentrated listening, something that happens less and less in our time. Yet there is still a scene for serious string quartet pieces, as more and more string quartets come on line after graduating from our many conservatories and schools of music. There are still chamber music societies in many cities across the land that frequently hire string quartets. It would be great if they, and the quartets they engage, would present and perform these and other pieces of the very recent past. What if each performance were to include a classic—Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert; a work of the twentieth Century—Bartok, Shostakovich, Rochberg, Ligeti, Corigliano; and finally a newly commissioned work or one from the last twenty years or so? This isn't exactly revolutionary stuff, but wouldn't this make for a much richer experience, for performer and listener alike? What if, what if?

Part Two: Chapter 15

Ned Rorem

Ned Rorem is one of our most distinguished composers. In his long life of ninety-three years he has won most of the awards to be won, including a Pulitzer Prize. He has written many songs and states that everything he writes is, at its essence, vocal. His life has been in the public eye with his tell-all diaries, and in the music battles of long ago he came out against the "complexity boys," as Virgil Thompson designated the American followers of Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositional style. His approach has always been as a Francophile: an interest in suaveness and directness, a lightheartedness and even casual, but never dumb, air. His music does not partake of the heightened seriousness and self-possession of the German tradition.

Rorem's music is not academic and is tonal. It is evocative and straightforward, clear in structure, and tantalizing in its colors. Its craft is never in doubt. Sometimes the music may be a little dry or brittle, perhaps a bit on the surface, but it is always direct and immediate. Whereas Messiaen aims for a direct encounter with the *Ineffable*, and to revel in the presentness of the mystical encounter with God, Rorem is about finding beauty and meaning in the ordinary rhythm of our lives. One might consider much of his music as musical diary entries, a glimpse of the moment and passing sensation raised to a sacred Now.

Primarily a song composer, it is natural that Rorem should excel in short forms. His *Piano Album I*, written over the years 1978 to 2001, is comprised of twenty-seven pieces, only one of which is longer than two minutes. They were mostly written as gifts to friends, the majority having been written for his long-term partner Jim.

Most of these works come off as well-thought-out studies, and often employ lean two-point counterpoint or simple left hand accompaniment to a tune in the right hand, and are spare or lean. They are gentle in spirit and thus rarely exceed a very moderate loudness, and are frequently in a waltz meter (or ¾), and given their brevity, stick mostly to one idea. Their

traversal through musical space and time is just right. Nothing is ever forced, and as Alice might say, all is as it should be, with just the right number of notes and not a note out of place. Sometimes the counterpoint seems to be a textbook display of Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum*—First, Second, or Third species—but with an American twist, as the rhythms have an easy lopping quality. A hint of early jazz is found in the harmonic language, with sevenths and ninths abundant, and endings have an easy settling quality. Unlike the music of the complexity boys he loathes, every movement has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Each is a little jewel held up for close inspection.

One might consider these wordless love songs, a genre that seems to have been taken over by the pop world. I can't think of many examples in the classical world over the last couple of generations. Perhaps in our world of swagger, overthinking, politics, academicism, and the highfalutin', the immediacy of the love song has been lost to serious music. Rorem recovers it in, of all places, these piano pieces.

Piano Album I may be found on the Naxo label performed by pianist Carolyn Enger. She displays lovely control of these delicate sonorities, with careful attention to balance and registration. Her touch is gentle but penetrating, reaching down into the sound, and her rhythmic sense is spot on for this delicate music, as she is often behind the beat—a little lazy and droll, with rubato just right. This music doesn't tell how virtuosic she is, as it rarely requires that kind of kinetic demonstration, but it does show that she has a huge heart and exquisite taste.

All of the short gem-like movements are separated by a lengthy setting of silence, so that each is allowed its own space and time, to breathe, and to refine the listening experience.

Part Two: Chapter 16

Pierre Jalbert

Pierre Jalbert writes music that is direct, speaks to the mind, heart, and soul, engages with notes and rhythms, traverses a musical landscape, and expresses a wide range of emotion. His music is connected to the past and continues that past into the present and future most notably through his engagement with the Catholic and mystical legacies.

Pierre Jalbert hails from Vermont, and the name is pronounced with a hard "J". He studied at the Oberlin Conservatory and then at the University of Pennsylvania during its years of Crumb, Wernick, and Rochberg, a trinity (although not like the Holy Minimalists of Pårt, Gorecki, and Tavener) whose predilections were toward the mystical, the hard-edged, and a reformed serialism. Jalbert's music is a welcome combination of all of these influences.

In this regard, do remember that no matter how iconoclastic a composer may be, he is only the sum of all that he has heard and experienced in his life, and what he chooses to accept or reject. Then it is a matter of digging deep into one's soul to find what is there to express, and having the willingness to do this day after day. It includes the development of a personal craft and a language that is expressive.

Jalbert has developed such a craft and language that is broad and expansive, yet exquisitely defined. It includes the most tonal of materials, as in the most known common chords, to atonal elements (set based sonorities) as well as the extended techniques of glissandi, prepared sounds on the keyboard, and harmonics, among others. His rhythms can go from pulsatingly minimal to slowly atmospheric. Each work and movement is paced just so and always of the right length; there aren't any non-essential notes thrown in for the hell of it. This is very hard to do, by the way, and separates the journeyman from the master. Some composers write a lot and figure that history will separate the chaff from the wheat; others write slowly and meticulously. Jalbert is of the latter type, and thus each piece is a finely wrought statement.

On a new disc, *Secret Alchemy- Music from Copland House*, three of the four pieces average sixteen minutes and the fourth comes in at twelve minutes. All are multi-movement works, which means large-scale architecture is to be found, and of a very satisfying sort. They are played expertly and the sound is to perfection. Standouts are violinist Curtis Macomber and pianist Michael Boriskin who appear on most of the pieces. This is a good place to start to become familiar with Jalbert's fine music.

Part Two: Chapter 17

Justin Rubin

Justin Rubin writes music that is direct and witty, speaks to the mind, heart, and soul, engages with notes and rhythms that matter, and does so clearly yet matter-of-factly. His music is connected to the past, through his relationship to the organ tradition and—in a surprising juxtaposition—to the memory of his engagement with the avant-garde.

Justin Rubin grew up in New York City. He is a polymath who was an extraordinary organist at a young age, having been awarded a Fulbright for study of that instrument in the Netherlands and landing a major church job in the City in his twenties. All the while he wrote music, finally studying at SUNY/Purchase with Dary John Mizelle and then with me at the University of Arizona. (I swore a while back that I would never write about my students but have recently recanted, asking myself, "why should they be penalized for having studied with me? I mean, it really isn't their fault!") He now teaches in that cultural mecca of the U.S—Duluth, MN!—and has been on the faculty of the University of Minnesota-Duluth for almost twenty years. I say this with a little mirth, but also only to demonstrate that good music can come from anywhere. Bach hung out in pretty back water towns but did okay with the pen and paper, producing a cantata a week (a week!) not to mention innumerable children (remember, no television). It would appear he wrote from left to right hardly stopping. Like Mozart, perhaps he heard the entire piece in his head before ever starting. Or maybe once he got into the zone he never left it.

Rubin was prolific as a student, coming each week to lessons with a brand new piece pretty much in finished form. The music, like other prolific composers (e.g. Telemann, Vivaldi, Milhaud, Glass), was of varying quality. Sometimes the ideas were interesting, sometimes not. It came in many styles as if Rubin were trying on different coats to see which fit best. He is very smart, but also very musical. He was performing and recording the music of Xenakis, most of which left me cold. (I had performed *Anaktoria* with Musical Elements, my New York-based contemporary ensemble, and found that sufficient for that composer to last a long time.) When he discovered I

was writing a Piano Concerto for Andre-Michel Schub and a consortium of orchestras, and that it was pretty much in the key of A Major, he had a hard time not smirking. At his age I probably would have as well.

In the last fifteen years or so Rubin's voice has become smooth and defined. He remains prolific, has written a slew of chamber music, much of it in small forms and of limited duration, and mostly for friends and colleagues. On the four discs I sampled, pieces are usually between three and ten minutes, with the average right around six. This is all to say that he gets in and gets out, says what he has to say, and then "*fertig*" (finished)! His sensibility ranges from witty to slightly nostalgic, from completely self-contained to variations on pre-existent hymns. For the most part this is music that is ear and mind grabbing. His new tonal language makes sense and the music breathes in a most human way. Like a good wine, the music has a nice aftertaste, and it comes in easy-to swallow gulps. The pacing is excellent and development keen.

One finds exciting and new instrumental combinations. For example: *Bagatelles* for bassoon and marimba, or *Hockett in your Pocket* for bassoon and percussion (yes, every piece on one disc is for bassoon and one other instrument!) This is music without a political agenda or puffery and is perfect for our fractured time. Check out his stuff on disc on the MSR, Innova, and Centaur labels. You could find it online as well, but there is better fidelity on the CDs and besides, it helps keep these little guys in business, which is a righteous thing to do.

PART TWO: CHAPTER 18

AUGUSTA READ THOMAS

Augusta Read Thomas is one of the most accomplished composers of the American mid-career group. She has been prodigiously prolific for the past thirty years or so of her professional life, including many works for orchestra. In this regard, she was the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1997-2006, and during her tenure wrote nine commissioned works.

Her music is light and effervescent, expressing a panoply of intricate shadings. Even at its most rhythmic, the music is always supple and probing. Her music engages and continues the tradition, as it is an extension of the French/Russian world of Debussy and Stravinsky and her primary teacher Jacob Druckman.

All of her strengths are displayed in a new release by the Utah Symphony that includes her work *EOS* (Goddess of the Dawn), a Ballet for Orchestra, which is in seven movements all written and played without break. Titles are evocative, starting with *Dawn* and then tracking the day.

Dawn enters with a slow sustained note very much like *Lontano* of Ligeti. The crescendo is less long, finally bringing in gesturally rich flute figures. Gestural here means the figure is quasi-improvisatory and thus its rhythms are fluid, sounding out of metered time. And as befits the time of day, instruments gradually appear as the world awakens, and the course of the movement is that of getting most of the orchestra playing and finally hitting some repeated eighth note motion as the day gets to chugging along. This movement segues into *Daybright and Firebright*, which is more episodic. It throws a single line around the orchestra with punctuations in a bravura-like manner with occasional pauses to catch its breath.

The third movement, *Shimmering,* does just that with lots of sustained high notes and tinkling percussion. *Dreams* is like the beginning, with languid materials in the flute and clarinet but now accompanied by a harp playing rising arpeggios. A slow, almost ponderous cello line breaks in and continues to the end of the movement paired with gossamer long-tones in

the winds. *Spring Rain* is dappled and splotched, and is formed of quickly changing stabs of color. The rhythm, like rain, is episodic, as it rushes forward then hesitates or stops. *Golden Chariot* takes over, and it is even more hectic and rambunctious, but very much a continuation of the previous, with the rhythm frenetic and of one layer. *Sunlight* concludes with bright long tones that are occasionally quickly reiterated, and ends in a tonal, lustrous, and fiery blaze.

Thomas's music is, above all, colorful. Her bright dazzling colors transform over time, so that we are drawn into their metamorphosis. Harmonic fields are at play that seem vaguely tonal and frequently emphasize unisons and perfect intervals, the major third, and the major seventh. In an impressionistic way, fast and scintillating solo winds are often accompanied by slow moving strings. The tessitura favors the higher ranges, keeping most of the music light and fleet. The orchestration features high percussion instruments—glockenspiel, crotales, vibraphones, and the like—adding to the high glistening and polished quality of sound. The larger structure is simple, clear, and elegant. Individual movements vary widely in duration, which creates a delightful sense of playfulness with music's primordial medium—time.

This is music that is always in motion, as if coming perpetually out of a magician's hat. It leads but doesn't direct, and is playful and subtle, dancing on light feet. It is music that conjures. The work is played beautifully and powerfully by the Utah Symphony and its music director Thierry Fischer, who commissioned the work. This is a fine and mature composition with which to begin to get to know this superb composer, and I suggest you pick it up pronto as it is not to be missed.

PART THREE

CRITICISM AND REVIEW

PART THREE: CHAPTER 1

HERB LONDON'S *THE TRANSFORMATIONAL DECADE*

In *The Transformational Decade* (2012), Herb London (1939–2018) presents an anguished view of America. It's a country hobbled by its own lack of confidence, out of touch with the great ideas on which it was founded, and senseless of its momentous achievements. Despite his dire assessment, London holds out hope that America can still find its way back to its core values.

The book surveys the almost-decade between 9/11 and Obama's election as President. But London's real conceptual timeframe begins with the cultural revolution of the mid-1960s and the resultant long shadow it has cast over the past decade or so. London places the blame for the country's current state of confusion on many of the usual candidates—diversity, multiculturalism, civil-rights leaders, obscenity (is anything still thus categorized?). To these he adds additional culprits, such as childcare centers, the Internal Revenue Service, and protesters (who should be called thugs or criminals). I am particularly fond of his questioning of the word *artist*, which was at one time reserved for individuals of real merit. Now every pop performer of any genre is a "recording artist," whereas the greatest classical performers and composers simply aren't acknowledged, let alone as artists. His point is simple: "that words are ideas incarnate. If words are used inaccurately, thoughts cannot be accurate."

London decries the shift in political values whereby "rights" have been raised over responsibilities. More than half of the population doesn't pay taxes but wants more services and benefits, which are, of course, its "right." His disequilibrium and confusion over our present situation extend to first principles, namely equal protection under the law and the precepts of the Judeo-Christian society. The former has been whittled away by affirmative action, while the destruction of the traditional family—and of the mores that it supported and that supported it—threaten to undermine the latter.

As an antidote to these depredations, London suggests a return to basics and commonsense. Want to lose weight? Take in fewer calories than you expend. Education? Forget all the mumbo-jumbo of self- esteem and creativity, and get back to memorization, drills, maybe even reading books.

But the disease threatens to overwhelm any possible cure. London scorns the inability of Democrats and Republicans to cross the aisle for the public good, in the areas of national security and the economy. In regards to the present danger of radical Islam, he doesn't mince his words: "Lives are at stake, regional stability is in the mix, and civilization itself is in the balance. The real scandal is that during these perilous times the parties should be working together despite their differences." Journalism takes a big hit too. All journalism should be a search for the truth, but in a move towards partisanship—or perhaps, more accurately stated, with the intrusion of politics—the journalistic enterprise has become ever more compromised.

In arriving at the latter part of the decade, London's distemper worsens. His major concerns remain the same: the cynical approach to the war on terrorism and the radicalization of our domestic life. That this has been overlaid with apathy on both the Right and the Left leaves him morose and, in a word, scared. Such decadence, complacency, and pessimism he finds reminiscent of Europe in the 1930s.

In a similar manner, our narcissistic elites are convinced that their subjective view of the world is what really matters. They assume that the United States is "invariably" wrong; believe in, and find everywhere, moral equivalence; and display that eternal sickness of Europe, anti-Semitism. Finally, they are incapable of finding anything unequivocally *evil*, which is a result of their moral obtuseness. London is concerned that a people who were once resilient will become reliant on the state; that, as a result, personal liberty and responsibility will necessarily diminish; that, while we remain an exceptional nation, our future is threatened. Relentless criticism has produced a "spiritual enervation." "The threats that the United States faces from a fanatical Islamic foe," therefore, "are made possible by our devotion to positions that undermine our heritage, accomplishments, and founding." London's is not a pretty picture, but it is compellingly clear and well-drawn.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 2

DAVID GELERNTER: *THE AIRHEAD ASCENDANCY*

I admit it. I find David Gelernter to be a most intriguing man. His day job is teaching computer science at Yale University, as witnessed in his book titled *Machine Beauty* (1998). This interest in beauty and aesthetics is revealed in his calling—his true soul's delight—his paintings. Both of these spheres are undergirded by his understanding of the world through the commitment and joy he finds in being Jewish, a deep sense of which is to be found in his *Judaism: A Way of Being* (2011).

America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered in the Obamacrats) is, quite frankly, unlike any other book of his I've read. If Gelernter is dismayed by the current state of America and its educational institutions, and he most assuredly is, it is because the state of the country strikes deep at all of those values he holds most dear.

In *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* (2008), Anthony Kronman (a fellow Yalie) traces the arc of cultural descent from the sixties. Gelernter suggests otherwise; he sees the cultural revolution as commencing right after World War II and actually concluding by 1970.

In his breezy, insouciant yet richly poetic way—he cites famous poems as he goes along—Gelernter argues that this revolution was made of two developments: "the Great Reform of elite American colleges that changed them from society colleges into intellectuals' colleges" and "the rise of Imperial Academia," wherein "professional schools and graduate schools and the bachelor's degree itself grew steadily more important." Underlying this change was the post-WWII takeover of colleges and universities by the "intellectuals"—a cohort for which Gelernter, like the noted historian Paul Johnson, does *not* have the highest regard.

The reason for this dislike is simple: intellectuals tend to live in a world of theory rather than blood and guts reality. They tend to view themselves

as rebels, and are thus reflexively left-liberal. For them this left-liberalism is doctrinal, and, like a religious creed, above discussion. As Gelernter puts it, following Lionel Trilling: "Intellectuals do not think . . . they have already thought."

In the universities, intellectuals teach their theories to "Airheads, who learn them and believe them." There is a sub-group—"Airheads-to-Be"—who "simply sunbathe and without making any special effort, absorb a great deal of radiant theoretical wisdom."

Before the revolution the cultural elite were the old-time WASPs. This group was basically conservative, believers in old-fashioned ideas such as the importance of religion, distinctions between formality and informality, private and public, and male and female. During the revolution, this group gave sway to "PORGIs"—post-religious, globalist intellectuals—a subcategory of which is PORGI Airheads, "intellectualizers, who have passed through the schools and colleges and come out seeing the world just as they are supposed to."

There is, however, a vast difference in the relationship of the WASPs to larger society in the past, and the relationship of the PORGIs to larger society today. The WASP establishment saw itself as the nation's "high end, at the top of a vertical spectrum," whereas PORGIs see themselves separated from the "Others" by a "Grand Canyon." The result is that the intellectuals, having won the day, have charted the course for the country, all the while "despising the nation at large as much as the nation had once despised them."

The change in America is related to what happened in Europe. Immediately following WWII, Europe essentially deposited Christianity in the dustbin of history and substituted (at least in Western Europe) a not-so-benign socialism. Having fought off the scourge of pagan Nazism and fascism, Christian Europe walked away from its victory (as American WASPS walked away from their position of eminence), leaving its legacy to eventual takeover by the faceless bureaucrats of the European Union—PORGIs to a man, and woman.

And now the story takes an interesting turn, as Gelernter openly discusses the part Jews have played in the cultural revolution. In Europe, the Jews, though never perceived by their host countries as being "real" citizens, served as "co-creators of European thought," speaking "with authority on European arts and letters, history and science." But they did so

as intellectuals, and with all of the baggage that nomenclature brings with it.

In the Great Reform in America, the WASP ascendancy eventually acquiesced in the larger penetration into the culture and the academy of Jewish influence, which tended to be intellectually leftist in political orientation and which coincided with the arrival of Jewish refugee intellectuals from Europe following the war. As Gelernter argues, "Jewish intellectuals, *not as Jews but as intellectuals*, were an important part of the flood that washed away American culture as it used to be; and they ranked among the cultural revolution's most sophisticated, intelligent, articulate, and belligerent voices." In this they were joined by other sophisticates, in particular self- hating WASPs such as Kingman Brewster, McGeorge Bundy, Mary McCarthy, William Sloane Coffin, and Robert Lowell, who also wished to bring the system down.

Under the old WASP ascendancy, elite colleges were places for the social elite to gather before heading off into the world. In contrast, Jews argued for merit as the primary criterion for entrance into the elite institutions, and then all institutions. But a meritocracy can't last; eventually some elite vision of how society should be arranged comes to prevail. Before the Great Reform, it is said that universities discriminated in favor of WASPS and men. Now they discriminate against whites of all religious persuasions in favor of "people of color" and in favor of women through affirmative action, which, for Gelernter, "is the greatest prejudice creator ever devised."

Like Kronman, Gelernter finds that after World War II America in general, and the universities in particular, became enamored of science. Scientific research, in tandem with our race against the Soviets as a result of Sputnik, contributed to the emphasis on the intellect and on intelligence as measured by IQ scores. If Ford and Edison stood for the importance of technology, Einstein was and is the icon of the age for sheer brain power.

In tandem with this heightened regard for pure intellect and IQ came the increased professionalization throughout academia and the working world as well. Self-learners and self-made men were replaced by credentialed men. General knowledge, or broader knowledge based on a quest to answer that pesky question alluded to in Kronman's book title—*Education's End*.. *the Meaning of Life*—gave way to specialization.

Aspiring teachers, who used to study the liberal arts, now found themselves in education schools. Those who would have gone into business, learning through doing, and/or from the bottom up, now went to business school. Journalists, who previously would have hardly called what they did a profession (or been insulted if told it was!), now went to journalism school. Academia replaced learning by doing with, what else, learning theories about what you would eventually do. Gelernter sees nothing particularly beneficial in this: "The idea that everyone needs a college education was always silly. That nearly everyone should then proceed from college to graduate school is even sillier." But all of this contributed to the elevation of academia as an institution of prime importance in American life.

The postwar years, particularly the fifties, were, contrary to popular belief, a pretty good time for ordinary people. People lived well, enjoying life's simple pleasures after the war. Self- confidence and optimism filled the air. The sixties came in with a bang, with the Students for a Democratic Society's Port Huron Statement of 1962, the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1965, and eventually the student antiwar movement galvanized by President Lyndon Johnson's commitment of tens of thousands of American troops to fight Communist North Vietnam in 1965. These movements all began in *universities*—home to the PORGIs who readily countenanced and eagerly promoted these actions.

This brings us to today: the age of Airheads and Obamacrats. If in the past leftists were governed by ideology, Obama and his ilk are "the post-cultural revolution PORGI elite," governed by sheer, unadulterated ignorance. Sadly, Obama also represents the failure of American higher education, where a left-liberal ideology has replaced real thinking and learning. Our students no longer learn history, economics, or the arts, but instead learn the *correct* theory of history, a supposedly moral stance for every economic situation, and that any and all human artistic expressions are equally valuable.

President Obama's ignorance is, for Gelernter, displayed in his complete lack of understanding of Guantanamo, Israel's border situation, EPA regulations, small business as exemplified by Joe the Plumber, and the qualifications for a Supreme Court judge. The theory he was guided by in this last instance is that a minority would make a better and wiser judge, because, as his nominee Sonia Sotomayor herself stated: "A wise [no lack of self-esteem here] Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived her life." The theory of course is idiocy, as "impartiality is what

justice has meant to Western man since the Bible." But Obama supported her and this nonsensical approach to what is the core value of our judicial system. Gelernter's conclusion from all of this is that the President doesn't know enough to be president and is typical of an educated but ignorant generation. Is there any hope for the future? Gelernter is pessimistic about the prospects for change in our universities. And since more students are being pushed into the university environment all the time, they will be filled with the prevailing left-liberal ideology. "*In modern American, the Left gets its way not by convincing people but by indoctrinating their children*" (italics in original).

Does Gelernter have a solution? Indeed he does, and like Tom Cruise's character in *The Firm* says, "It isn't sexy, but it has teeth." The solution is Internet education across the board, so that students and parents can take control of educational content and bias, from grade school through college, and find mentors who really know something, who understand that this is a great nation under God, based on the goodness of Western civilization, which has brought us our notions of freedom and justice, our sense of liberty, as well as science, math, medicine, engineering, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, and music.

The PORGIs have taken away history and ethics, but these can and should be restored. For our primary problems are not "economic or political. They are social, cultural, educational, and (above all) spiritual." At the end of his book Kronman asks for a return from the present postmodern stance to the previous one of secular humanism. In his closing, Gelernter makes clear with his use of the term "American Zionism" that he calls for a reintroduction of the spiritual. He proposes that the American enterprise, like the true Jewish one, is not about America as a place for pedestrian human activity, but about human activity as a purposeful, holy endeavor. An American people who return to living with and for this ideal will continue to be a source of goodness and a beacon to the nations. He concludes, "We have barely begun to bloom."

PART THREE: CHAPTER 3

A REVIEW AND COMMENTARY ON COPLAND'S *MUSIC AND IMAGINATION*

The prestigious Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard University was established in 1925 and involves a one-year residency and the delivery of at least six lectures, which are often collected as books. The idea of "poetry" is broadly defined and really encompasses all the arts and the criticism of them. In the 1951–1952 academic year, Aaron Copland gave the Norton Lectures at Harvard. Paul Hindemith and Igor Stravinsky had given the lectures in previous years, but Copland was the first American-born composer to do so, perhaps a sign of the recognition of the increasing sophistication of American music in the postwar period.

A somewhat shy and self-contained man, Copland never attended college. Rather, his formative years were spent in Paris, where he studied with the renowned musical pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. He not only experienced Paris of the mid-twenties—then the center of the art world—but took in through all the senses the major artistic trends of the time. Copland thus mixed it up with the likes of Stravinsky, Picasso, Braque, Cocteau, Stein, Satie, Man Ray, and many others, either in person or by encountering their work. In this regard, he was an autodidact in many of these areas of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

Copland viewed himself in a slightly self-deprecatory manner for never having gone to college. He shouldn't have, though, for what he lacked in getting a university credential Copland made up for with natural intellect and curiosity, perhaps somewhat in the Lincoln and Whitman manner. He was a lifelong reader and prolific writer, a maker and observer of the scene. Copland spoke and wrote in a straightforward manner. He was, through his compositions, a witness of himself and his time, and through his writings, a proponent for his art and proselytizer for a serious engagement with music.

Copland's music also bears these qualities. It is clear in all musical domains, as in rhythm, pitch, and, of course, form. Nothing is forced, nor is there ever gratuitous padding. While his music is still highly regarded today,

Copland has fallen somewhat out of favor. But then so has that other father of American music, Charles Ives. Why might this be?

The current musical scene is polarized, just as is our politics. The two major poles are perhaps best represented by John Cage and Elliott Carter. Both are men who started writing using their ears, produced some very decent work, and then were seduced into philosophies that raised the *idea* of music over the sonic result. Cage found chance, to reduce his ego participation in the process of writing, and Carter found European complexity, based on that Continental proclivity to speak at length without saying much at all. Copland for the most part continued throughout his career to write his own finely wrought works that belied pretension and ostentation—works that are well-heard and continue to offer the greatest aesthetic and aural pleasure, and that at their deepest, display a rugged and truthful beauty.

Copland wrote slowly and only what he heard, constantly testing his inner ear with the piano to confirm his correctness. While Ives sometimes wrote more than he could hear—as when setting different folk tunes at the same time—he knew that each part would be identifiable, and thus actually heard. Ives's most avant-garde experiments were just that, experiments, and often composed with a sense of humor. Copland's music is also filled with humor and zest—and the real stuff. The avant-garde that came to prominence in the post-WWII period is either humorless or presents a humor filled with a postmodern sense of the ironic, which tends not to be humorous at all. The avant-garde essentially raised thought or idea above the actual sound, the mind above emotion, deadly seriousness over a serious playfulness—and the musical results are, for the most part, arid and sterile.

In the 1950s, while the avant-garde was just gearing up, Copland was at the height of his prestige and popularity; thus he was asked to give the Norton Lectures, which were published by Harvard University Press in 1952 in a tidy little book, *Music and Imagination*.[1] The book is still important for us today, for it confronts issues and asks questions at the center of current artistic and cultural endeavors.

The book is divided into two parts of three chapters each. In part one, "Music and the Imaginative Mind," Copland discusses "The Gifted Listener," "The Sonorous Image," and "The Creative Mind and the Interpretative Mind."

[1] Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (1952 lecture, published by President and Fellows of Harvard College; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

These more philosophical musings are followed by part two, "Musical Imagination and the Contemporary Scene," which includes a look at the particulars of the then current music scene in chapters titled "Tradition and Innovation in Recent European Music," "Musical Imagination in the Americas" (both North and South), and "The Composer in Industrial America."

As mentioned, the Norton lectures are presented in the guise of a poetry professorship. Copland begins by noting the commonalities of music and poetry, and that there is an essence that joins them, "an area where the meaning behind the notes and the meaning beyond the words spring from a common source." Copland doesn't so much state what this is as allude to the possibility that both try to get past the limited understanding of the world that is provided only by the rational mind, that is represented by words in their most common formulation. Both poetry and music present the reality behind, or before, the words—the realms of wonder and the miraculous.

Music, Copland writes, does this by presenting an aspect of our inner life, "the part that *sing*s." He then makes a statement that appears simple and almost perfunctory, but holds a great meaning, or question:

> Purposeful singing to me signifies that a composer has come into possession of musical materials of related orders of experience; given these, the composer's problem then is to shape them coherently so that they are intelligible in themselves, and hence, communicable to an audience. . . . The musical work must be reinterpreted . . . re-created in the mind of the performer or group of performers. Finally the message reaches the ear of the listener, who must then relive in his own mind the completed revelation of the composer's thought.

Before we parse this statement, I should mention that Cage questioned the entire enterprise suggested here by Copland in asking what, in fact, do the activities of composition, performance, and listening have to do with each other? In other words, he questioned the very basis of the musical enterprise, the notion of intent that underlies it and the idea that there should be a general common perception of what is heard.

Copland assumes a "purposeful singing." Neither mindless nor incoherent, it embodies an idea. This might be an inchoate emotional state at its inception, but it must take shape to be understood. And as the American composer George Rochberg said, why shouldn't it be something that can be appertained and retained in the memory? It is an individual idea, and is thus memorable, even if this necessitates multiple hearings. This usually means a short musical phrase or motive (like the opening of

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—da-da-da-dum) or a longer melody (as in Shubert's Unfinished Symphony) or an emotional or affective quality—like one of speed, relentlessness, loss, solitude—that is more abstract in its musical presentation.

The composer "has come into possession of musical materials." Copland knows, as all true artists do, that the notion of idea creation is, at best, a most mysterious process. Because the word "possession"—like the word "possessed," as in "to be possessed"—acknowledges that what is created does not usually come from the side of rationality, but that of intuition. Thus an idea comes to the composer and is almost presented for his inspection. He can reject or accept it, acknowledge its veracity, and judge it, in order to find its strengths and weaknesses, to shape it into its best form and to find its essential nature. For Mozart, Schubert, and Mendelssohn these ideas seem to have sprung forth fully formed—there is little to judge or change—as they simply *appear* in all their glory. For Beethoven, Stravinsky, and Copland the birthing process is slower, more time intensive, and demands a constant shuttling between the rational and intuitive states.

The composer has come into possession of musical materials of "related orders of experience." What is this experience? Is it purely musical—is the composer commenting on his experience of other music, on his experience as a sentient, living human being? The answer is yes to both. The two cannot be distinguished or untangled by the composer or the listener, nor for that matter, should they necessarily be separable. It is fine to step back, as the theorist or musicologist does, to take stock of particulars in the music. This moving into the workings of the music can certainly aid in understanding and appreciating it, but it can't define or contain the listening experience, which at its best must be done whole. In the visual arts we look at a painting or sculpture, witness it in its entirety, then start to analyze its components, its texture, form, color, line, etc. But as we do this we are constantly referencing back to our experience of the whole. Experiencing music must be done in the same manner but with the added complication of doing this over time, which is why real listening takes numerous passes.

It should come as no surprise that the first chapter of *Music and Imagination* is "The Gifted Listener." While Copland led the young generation of composers in the United States, provided leadership for gifted composers in Mexico, Latin America, and South America, and taught at Tanglewood (from its inception), he was overwhelmingly concerned with the problem of communication. Copland sought out opportunities to

educate, to spread the word of the great and beneficial power of music. In doing this, he endeavored to define and better understand the art of listening. While primarily interested in the amateur, but not unsophisticated listener, Copland was well aware that the other parties in the musical enterprise—composers and performers/interpreters—are listeners, too.

The composer must listen to the inner voice that directs him to create, to listen for that which he must hear, while the performer must listen for the voice of the composer, to that which is in the notes and that which resides between them. This is, of course, embodied in teaching music. As students (whether instrumentalists or eager listeners) discover the inner workings of the music and absorb its grandeur, their appreciation of the music increases, and their ability to make or hear the beauty is manifest. Thus, the good teacher brings students into the workings of the musical discourse while safeguarding their passion for the music.

But let's return to the gifted listener, that unknown person who sits in the concert hall (leaving out the problem of iPods and the like for now) and hears. What is it that Copland asks of him? He asks the listener to have an "imaginative mind"… that the facts of music . . . are only meaningful insofar as the imagination is given free play." He suggests that listening is a talent and that it involves two aspects—the ability to open oneself fully to the experience and then to be able to judge that experience. Copland also holds to the Kantian ideal that contemplation, or in this case contemplation as listening, is its own reward. "For there are few pleasures in art greater than the secure sense that one can recognize beauty when one comes upon it." Copland also recognizes the sacred quality of music and our ability to be moved by it. "Recognizing the beautiful in an abstract art like music partakes somewhat of a minor *miracle*; each time it happens I remain slightly incredulous." Copland says that the "ideal listener . . . would combine the preparation of a skilled professional with the innocence of the intuitive amateur"—a bit like Copland himself.

"The ideal listener . . . possesses the ability to lend himself to the power of music." In so doing, the listener must concentrate on the music's emotional overtones. This idea seems to be especially problematic in our time, which is characterized by a lack of quietude and thus an inability to probe and understand one's internal emotive landscape. The pervasive background noise of our civilization makes introspection—time with the self—almost impossible. But this is one of music's goal. And the real listening of real music demands internal interaction and emotional discovery.

While this is problematic for all of us today, our young performers and listeners are especially affected: performers emphasize technical virtuosity and speed at the expense of real feeling; listeners struggle to understand the music's emotional basis because they haven't really experienced those emotions. However, the great performance of a fine piece can awaken what's sleeping or latent in the listener. Studying an instrument and playing a great or new and exciting piece of music can widen the emotional landscape of both player and listener.

This process is not easy. The deep musical experience has "the aspect of a very hazardous undertaking. It is hazardous because at so many points it can break down; at no point can you seize the musical experience and hold it." Copland uses "hazardous" rather than other choices such as "fragile" or "delicate." The word implies a journey fraught with the possibility of losing one's way at any time. The composer may not capture the essence of the idea and thus the composition is compromised. The performer may not realize everything the work has to offer or simply give a dull and uninspired performance. Finally, the listener may not find it within himself to engage with, let alone understand, the work.

"Hazardous" also suggests danger, danger suggests survival, and this all suggests that something is on the line, and that this something has *meaning*. In this sense, the artistic process possesses such a deep meaning that our survival depends on our engagement with it—that the ability to attune to and process this artistry is fundamental and essential to our humanity. The capacity to accept a beginning, middle, and end, to perceive the connections among composer, performer, and listener, is in a way parallel to how we have to understand our lives. The nature of the artistic enterprise—in all of its manifestations—like very few other human enterprises, gives our life a rich and textured meaning. It deepens our personal emotional landscape, our understanding of our relationship to the external world, and expands our sense of what humankind is capable of creating. It is, in the secular sphere, a miracle.

The listener is impelled to ask what this music "means." The answer, of course, is that the meaning is in the music itself. The music may connote something in the listener's mind, but this can vary. Singing is the feeling and meaning for the composer—the greater the intensity of the feeling, the more pure its expression. And here is the rub. "It is only the literary mind that is disturbed by this imprecision. No true music-lover is troubled by the symbolic character of musical speech; on the contrary, it is this very

imprecision that intrigues and activates the imagination." As individuals and as a civilization, we have trouble with such ambiguity.

In our scientific age we assume there are, and seek, definitive answers. Our paradigm is a binary world of yes/no, on/off. Music suggests that this way of perceiving the world isn't possible, and more important, isn't the manner in which humans fundamentally function. Or perhaps more to the point, that to function in this way represents a degradation of what it means to be human in all of its grandeur and messy complexity. For we are mind and body, thought and emotion, birth, life, and death. Music offers a glimpse of that state of perfect reconciliation of these aspects of human existence; it allows us to grasp at full and complete awareness, to touch the ineffable.

Like our lives, music is in a constant state of becoming. This is somewhat unnerving, because it corresponds to our deep-seated understanding of life's transience. Music is in a state of becoming until, like us, it stops. It is in our nature to seek significance in life's journey, and to plan for or anticipate its end. Aaron Copland, better than most, created music that corresponds to this fundamental aspect of the human journey.

Postscript: Let me suggest a few works by Copland that you might like to experience. These include his *Piano Variations*, *Piano Sonata*, and *Piano Fantasy*. I think these pieces represent the greatest American contribution to the piano literature of the twentieth century. They aren't easy listening, but repeated listening will pay off. The pieces are included on the extraordinary CD by pianist Robert Weirich, Albany Records No: ALB 989. You should also listen to Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, *Short Symphony*, *Symphony No. 3*, and *Piano Quartet*. Good recordings of the first three are available with the composer conducting, or with conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, who has a great sensibility for this music. Lastly, don't miss *The Dickinson Songs*. Thereafter, continue exploring on your own.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 4

REVOLUTIONS: A RESPONSE TO JOHN BORSTLAP'S *THE CLASSICAL REVOLUTION*

Academia has been in the midst of a musical revolution for the last fifty years. This parallels that in other academic areas, particularly the other arts and humanities, where the ideology of postmodernism has taken hold. This ideology is simply the notion that in matters of judgment all is now in the eye of the beholder: individualism has triumphed, and there isn't—and there can never again be—any communal agreement on the greater or lesser beauty or truthfulness of any object or idea over any other (today, it is suggested that the hard sciences may not even be excluded from this generalization). In the musical arena this plays out very simply—courses are now offered in jazz, rock, mariachi, American song, world music of various locations, and the Western classical tradition. It is not suggested to students that any one of these might be more rewarding or possess more richness and depth than any other. All are equal and equally valid.

In *The Classical Revolution: Thoughts on New Music in the 21st Century* (2017), John Borstlap offers an excellent and expansive view of where we now are in the larger world of contemporary art music (music in the tradition of Western classical music), both in America, and from his vantage point, in Europe. It is a rather radical view of the situation—in which "radical" paradoxically describes a possible return to moderation—a turn away from an ossified and bored transgressive bohemianism where anything goes. Bortslap being Dutch and trained in England, his examples tend toward the Continental, but they pertain just as well to the situation in the States. For while the scene in Europe is even worse than in the States, both suffer from the effects of modernism, especially its consequent, postmodernism.

We find ourselves in a post-postmodernist river, canoeing without a paddle. The problem in Europe was state support for the arts, while in America the retreat of serious music into the academy led to the creation of

"academic music." Both situations stretched the already tenuous relationship between the music-loving audience and new music to the breaking point. Bortslap suggests that a more salutary and fruitful landscape is emerging. But first let us see what he suggests has actually occurred over the last hundred years or so.

Bortslap's approach is psychological, philosophical, and historical, for the questions pertaining to art music of the past hundred years cannot be torn out of the tapestry of related questions: What is the beautiful? Can one use the words "natural," "spiritual," or "meaning" without provoking derision? Do, or should, artists express their times, and thus the horrors of the twentieth century? Is there progress in artistic languages, and in music—is one irrelevant if one doesn't speak in the twelve-tone language, as Pierre Boulez so famously stated? Can one still talk about music, or again, art more broadly, as providing an aesthetic, rather than just an entertaining, experience? Does the fate of this music symbolize, or is it a part of, the much broader war on the nature of what used to pass for our culture?

In setting the stage for his discussion Bortslap makes a number of useful observations. One is that the general classical musical culture has fragmented into numerous separate spheres. These include musical organizations that essentially perform a museum-like function, playing almost exclusively music of the past. Think of orchestras and operas, fine examples of which are the New York Philharmonic or the Metropolitan Opera, flagships of their respective worlds. While each occasionally programs the new work, this is usually done in an obligatory manner and rarely involves slating in the major positions. In other words, in orchestral programs the new work is usually the opener, and rarely the concerto. The spot reserved for the big piece, let's say the symphony (Brahms, Mahler, etc.), is almost never given to the living composer. The new opera is almost always now driven by the libretto, then possible production values, and then the celebrity singer. The actual music is always of lesser importance. The fact that those pieces in the repertory are there first and foremost because of their musical content seems not to transfer to the new work.

The other part of the classical musical world is composed of organizations exclusively devoted to the new: Bang on the Can, Eighth Blackbird, the Kronos Quartet, etc., and, of course, festivals such as Darmstadt, held annually or whenever in wherever (the latter more of a historical European than American phenomenon).

Bortslap suggests that this is actually quite normal, if perverse, as the modernist enterprise involved the creation of a totally new art form—what he terms "sound art" or "sonic art"—which was based upon a fundamental break with the practices and normative aesthetic values of the past. He proposes that in the artistic realm this began with Dada and Marcel Duchamp, wherein a urinal becomes an art object, and grew to encompass work such as Warhol's commercial art replications, Damien Hirst's formaldehyde fish, and Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*. The analogue in music is to everything after Arnold Schoenberg's Op. 23, which unleashed twelve-tone music on the world, or more to the point, negated all that tonality represented: order, hierarchy, memorability, formal clarity, shared style. (One might add that Schoenberg, very much aware of the disruption the new music represented, composed early twelve-tone pieces in established, thus, historical forms—gavotte, bourrée, etc.—a practice his European successors severely criticized and departed from post haste.) Bortslap dismisses the chance movement of John Cage as not even worth countering, because the music that resulted from this approach is so utterly inconsequential.

The other problem with sound art (or "organized sound," as Edgard Varèse called it) is that it removes emotion from the musical equation. In so doing, it responded to numerous historical factors. These included the two World Wars and their devastating effect on man's (particularly European man's) psyche, which resulted in the desire to suppress emotions and our emotional nature, for wasn't it precisely these emotions, unleashed, that produced such barbarities? But it also involved starting over again, from "ground zero," with the devastation of Europe at the end of WWII, as it was so famously described. But this assumes not only that memory could be obliterated—and the objects of the past truly ignored—but that man's fundamental nature could be recalibrated, a proposition mostly espoused by utopians, totalitarians, and fascists. Thus, the totalitarian comments of Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, et al., regarding the inevitability of their musical methodologies as well as their belief in the complete irrelevance of any music that had come before them.

This lockstep approach to music, and the arts more generally, broke in America before it did in Europe. Bortslap is correct in associating this with the birth of minimalism and the serial apostasy undertaken by such composers as George Rochberg, David Del Tredici, and numerous others. These composers fled the tyranny of the twelve-tone method for many reasons, including the desire to express a wider arc of emotion, a greater

capacity for human expressiveness; the desire (explicit with Rochberg) to reconnect with history, and thus humanity; and the recognition that the arts should not try to best the sciences or the scientific approach, but rather that music provides a unique way of helping us understand ourselves in the world.

There are occasional missteps, such as when Bortslap veers off into the realms of architecture, European philosophy, Jung, or cultural relativism. One sometimes has the sense of ideas being overworked a bit or repeated without enough development. Yet this is done in the interest of widening the context and is somewhat useful, because Bortslap looks at the relationship among politics, historical facts, philosophical conceptions of meaning and emotion, all in their relationship to music, meaning, and the transcendental. Not surprisingly, Bortslap finds that while some sound art can be interesting and intriguing, it rarely has deep emotive meaning and almost never reaches the transcendental. In other words, sound art has a strong relationship to kitsch. In Bortslap's view, this is largely due to the abandonment of tonality. Like Fred Lerdahl, Ray Jackendoff, and others, he sees humans as being programmed for some version of tonality. Bortslap doesn't define this as a rigid system, but rather as a world defined by musical gravity, heard relationships, successions of pitches that create gestalts and thus swaths of meaning, hierarchical relationships, and, most important, a sense of structure or architectural coherence that allows for the feeling of journey, which implies almost by definition, a beginning, middle, and end. Bortslap suggests that this is, in some respects, predicated on the physical nature of sound, while it is understood that materials pertaining to music-making, be they instruments, scales, or rhythms, are man-made.

In arguing for a new classical revolution in music, or for supporting the one that already exists, Borstlap is arguing for a radical sense of moderation. One cannot obliterate history, so without slavishly following it, why not learn from it? Is it wrong to think of the composer's task as building on the tradition of music (not sonic art)? Shouldn't music contain emotion and heard meaning? Is it possible that the world of Schoenberg and his followers and fellow travelers is not the future but a dead-end, a period of historic note of little aesthetic value?

Finally, Borstlap lists a number of mostly European composers who fit his criteria of writing really good *music*, not *sonic art*. Their American counterparts, a few of whom he mentions, would include Rochberg, John Adams, William Bolcom, Aaron Jay Kernis, Paul Moravec, Robert Beaser,

Del Tredici, John Harbison, Christopher Rouse, Daniel Asia, and John Corigliano for starters.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 5

TUMBLING DOWN: A REVIEW OF BAUERLEIN AND BELLOW'S *THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN MIND*

It is well-known to anyone involved in academia that the state of the American mind is not good. Whether it is due to shoddy thinking, an inability to articulate thoughts, or poor writing skills, most of our students are pretty much a mess. That this mirrors the state of the larger culture is axiomatic.

Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow address this phenomenon in their new book, *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism* (2016), a compilation of essays addressing the anti-intellectualism, and maybe just the downright stupidity, of our age. The editors present their case in a lucid introduction recounting the historical uniqueness of the "American Mind" (note the capital): un-hierarchical, self-made, self- reliant, independent of thought and action, thrifty and industrious, and disdainful of authority. This Mind also knew specific content such as the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Bible, and appreciated the gifts of a divided tripartite federal government, local control, and a free press. While prizing the self, it also believed in the common good, and was willing to put time and effort into it; thus the well-prized multitude of organizations of free association.

By the 1980s this Mind had passed into history. Acknowledged by all, the only question was what one thought of that passing. Those on the right mourned it, while those on the left praised it; the former saw it as the passing of America's glory, while the latter saw its demise as making way for multiculturalism and diversity. This book therefore doesn't quibble about the status of where we are today, but rather assesses the ramifications of this change. Bauerlein and Bellow suggest it has wrought the following:

> Instead of acquiring a richer and fuller knowledge of U.S. history and civics, American students and grown-ups display astounding ignorance of them . . .
>
> Civic virtue is a fading trait, our political sphere now typically understood as merely a contest of group interests. Patriotism and the common good are quaint notions.
>
> Individualism has evolved from "rugged" versions of the past into present modes of self- absorption. . . .
>
> Instead of holding basic liberties, more and more Americans accept restrictions on speech, freedom of association, rights to privacy, and religious conscience.[1]

The book is divided into three sections: "Indicators of Intellectual and Cognitive Decline" looks at IQ and lagging skill levels; "Personal and Cognitive Habits/Interests" considers news avoidance, lack of attention span, and self-absorption; and "National Consequences," as a summation, examines "broader trends affecting populations and institutions, including rates of entitlement claims, voting habits, the culture of criticism, and higher education."

The editors are frankly judgmental and moral in their stance. If Americans don't read or vote, this is a moral problem. If they fall short of upholding American ideals, they need to be told. In short, "The American Mind was an extraordinary creation, and it has to be remembered" and, of course, revived. Because we live in a time of material plenty and technological wonders, we ponder why it is in such a sad state. The book's essayists help us to understand this phenomenon.

E.D. Hirsch Jr. is a path-maker in approaching this question in the realm of education. He outlined the problem twenty-five years ago in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. A college professor of the humanities and a man of progressive persuasion, Hirsch decided to try to figure out why more students weren't prepared for college and why many never made it there. Foraging through various academic fields, including cognitive psychology and statistics, he made two simple discoveries. IQ and SAT test scores went down not because the pool was widened to include a more diverse population, but because a teacher cohort changed from

[1] Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow, eds., *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2015), xii.

focusing on knowledge-based learning to emphasizing that students should "learn how to learn"; he discovered that abstract skills cannot develop without a strong basis of fundamental content to support them. Hirsch was, and remains, particularly concerned about how this affects the disadvantaged. Whereas in middle-class homes a body of common knowledge is purveyed in conversation, family excursions, visits to museums, books, and in conversations around the kitchen table, for others less fortunate, the knowledge and vocabulary learned in these settings will largely need to be transmitted in schools instead. He therefore argues for a core of cumulative knowledge, one that promotes an understanding of the American Mind, which is needed for a democratic citizenry to function.

Bauerlein's contribution is "The Troubling Trend of Cultural IQ." Oddly enough, it begins with the news that IQ numbers have been rising, which should be cause for celebration. Surely this means that the average American is getting smarter. But this is so only if intelligence is defined as "the capacity for abstraction," since this is where the numbers have really shot up. The conundrum, then, is why young people remain woefully deficient in basic knowledge and educational skills. For example, "their reading comprehension hasn't improved at all," and verbal SAT scores plummeted from 1962 to 1980. This led one reviewer of similar data to note, "Today's children may learn to master basic reading skills at a younger age, but are no better prepared for reading more demanding adult literature." So, whereas they might do better in STEM areas of knowledge, they won't be able to function well in the humanities, as they will fail in synthesizing sophisticated ideas.

Bauerlein agrees with Hirsch's argument that "buried knowledge," "relevant prior knowledge," and "background knowledge" aren't being taught, thus the downward trend on other important sub-scores, in particular vocabulary. Bauerlein notes the creation of an adolescent culture over the last fifty years or so, wherein young people have had less interaction with adults. The result is a segregated youth culture that is profoundly—well, adolescent—in its ideas and speech. The solution suggested is somewhat quaint. Parents need to engage their children in conversation, read together, go to museums and concerts, and generally provide more adult-guided interaction. Our youth-obsessed society is thwarting this at every juncture, but this is the only solution to the increasing segregation and cultural illiteracy of our young people.

Daniel Dreisbach, a professor in the School of Public Affairs at American University, makes the commonsensical suggestion that "Biblical

Literacy Matters." American history and culture are rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and are the source material for understanding who we are, how we started, and the ideas and metaphors that matter to Americans. The Jewish Exodus was seen as analogous to the American Founding. The Protestant Christian Reformation struck at the heart of being commanded by a religious elite, and required of its followers that they know their Bible. An ancillary positive of this is that almost all early Americans could read—an important trait for citizens of a republican democracy. Lessons from the Bible were woven into all aspects of American life, including its "social, legal, and political culture." The Founders understood well that a republican form of government relied on a virtuous and engaged citizenry, and on the pillars of education and religion.

Dreisbach goes so far as to say that if you don't know your Bible it is impossible for all parties in a conversation to communicate—it runs that deep. He says that "every educated mind . . . must be acquainted with the basic stories, themes, claims and symbols of Christianity and its sacred text, the Bible." The same claim should be made for the Hebrew Scriptures, since, as Dreisbach notes, the Founders and their community discovered great commonality with Jewish stories, if not always with Jews themselves. Today's universities have incoming freshman read banal and trivial writings so they have a "common point of reference." Wouldn't it be refreshing to see assigned instead the Book of Job, Genesis, or Luke, so that new college students would find something in common not only with their age cohort, but also their nation and civilization?

Gerald Graff, professor of English and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, argues for "Arguespeak" in "Why Johnny and Joanie Can't Write, Revisited." Arguespeak is the "they say/I say" format, which summarizes a position or argument followed by the writer's response. Graff recognizes that Arguespeak goes against the grain of almost all current educational philosophy, but notes that it *does* work. Arguespeak also makes for more civil discourse, as it demands a cogent, dispassionate understanding of an opponent's argument before giving a response. This approach seems simple and promising, but leaves us pondering if and how it would allow a place for creative writing—poems, stories, plays. Because while our students certainly can't write they also aren't able to understand themselves or make sense of their relationship to the rest of the world, an issue creative written expression might help address.

Richard Arum, who with co-author Josipa Roksa, wrote the seminal *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2011),

updates his findings in "College Graduates: Satisfied, but Adrift." Arum argues that in fighting for students (consumers), universities have lavished money and attention on social amenities, while taking diminishing interest in their primary function: to educate. The decline in student knowledge competencies has been demonstrated in many studies. Arum notes the differential between undergraduate and graduate outcomes, the former being weak and the latter stronger. In an era of global competition our graduation rates are exceeded by numerous countries, although many are much smaller than America and therefore the comparison is less helpful. (Arum mentions Iceland, for example, which has a graduation rate of 41 percent.) Today's college students study vastly less than they did twenty-five years ago, on average less than an hour a day, but earn good grades nonetheless. Students—and administrators—think that they are learning just fine, while only 33 percent of their future employers believe that colleges are preparing these students to succeed in the workplace. And in the most damning of news, when tracked longitudinally in core competencies—analyzing, writing, and reading—students make almost *no* improvement during their years in college.

In "Anatomy of an Epidemic," journalist and author Robert Whitaker makes a strong case against the persistent use of drug therapy for depression and other more severe forms of mental illness. Since one in five of all Americans take some form of psychotropic drug, this affects academia as much as society at large. *DSM III* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1980), the bible of psychiatry, and its subsequent editions defined mental illness much more broadly, and stated that drug therapy trumped Freudian or other forms of talk therapy. Yet studies of the last fifteen years show that instead of helping, psychiatric drugs "induce the very changes hypothesized to cause the illness in the first place," and that these drugs worsen the situation over the long term. The result is that we now have more people defined with a mental illness and more of them taking drugs that will over time worsen their symptoms. Since the messiness of the mind is now quickly termed an illness, the ideas that we have the capacity for free will and are responsible for our emotions and actions have taken a big hit.[2] What it means to be an American is thus proscribed and diminished, and we as a nation are less vigorous, confident, and assertive as a result.

In "A Wired Nation Tunes Out the News," the first essay of part two, Saint Michael's College media studies, journalism, and digital arts professor

[2] See, for example, Stewart Justman, "The Medicalization of Misspelling: *DSM* and the Management of Life," *Academic Questions* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 322–33.

David T. Z. Mindich writes about our faltering relationship with the news and what was once called current events. The Founders took freedom of the press seriously because they assumed that an informed and inquisitive citizenry is vital to a republican democracy. Americans read newspapers and pamphlets. This is no longer true among the younger generations, and historically these patterns do not change within a cohort as it ages. But Mindich does note that despite the conventional wisdom, quality news does sell better—if you provide good materials, they will read. He suggests that schools and colleges "signal" that political engagement and knowledge of the news are important. Finally, he suggests that government "incentivize" broadcasters to provide more news and public affairs programming. There are problems with Mindich's answers. How do you get people away from television news in order to read more news, which is almost by definition more nuanced? And if successful at that, how do you get them to read *high-quality* print materials? Where in the school curriculum does one *place* newspapers? And finally, do we want more governmental intrusion into our media, let alone into our lives?

In "Catching our Eye: The Alluring Fallacy of Knowing at a Glance," former *Boston Globe* columnist and author Maggie Jackson takes on a simple problem—the speed at which society now moves—in an elegant way. Reading is now almost all superficial, and sustained analysis considered old-fashioned. It is rare that we look deeply at anything, such as a masterpiece in a museum, or actually listen, I would add, because to do so requires *time*; it is the "vehicle of understanding." Jackson makes the case that to understand we must get past the surface and appearances: "Skill and time in looking are a necessity to decode any aspect of our environment." She explicates this process with her three-hour encounter of Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, in which her description of gradually coming to understand its content is quite delicious.

In "The Rise of the Self and the Decline of Intellectual and Civic Interest," San Diego State University psychology professor and author Jean M. Twenge doubles down on Arum's argument that the current idea of believing in yourself trumps being able to accomplish something. Twenty years ago this was called creating high self-esteem, and then all good things will follow, it was thought. But the shift now to focusing on the self—the deluded and superficial feeling rather than the active and aware self—overrides actually acquiring the knowledge how to do something. The ancillary result is the "forsaking of interest in issues outside of the self," and so our students think they are smarter and better educated than they are. This

is abetted by being told that they are smart and having this confirmed by good grades received due to grade inflation. Narcissism is off the charts, while interest in the intellectual life has ebbed. Not surprisingly, this has also negatively affected civic engagement and an interest in politics. How to respond to this?

We should communicate that self- belief is nice, but being able to do something is a lot better, that hard work is a good value and money isn't all it is cracked up to be—a purposeful, meaningful life is better.

In "Has Internet Fueled Conspiracy-Mongering Crested?" columnist and blogger Jonathan Kay makes the case that conspiracy-mongering isn't good for the polity, but that this problem has probably peaked as we have become savvier at sifting through the information. While many people simply believe the strangest things, Kay sees a more studied use of the Internet, *Wikipedia*, and Google's new algorithms as antidotes.

In "Dependency in America: American Exceptionalism and the Entitlement State," the first essay of part three, Nicholas Eberstadt, Henry Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute, suggests that an antagonistic relationship exists between American exceptionalism and the entitlement state. Americans claiming economic benefits from the government and feeling *entitled* to receive them are revolutionary changes in our thinking and policy. Eberstadt worries about the effects on the American Mind when so many of us are "takers" of some sort, and, of course, the concomitant effects, including "the breakdown of the family structure and the flight from work of working-age men." Eberstadt is not sanguine about the future as he says that "collusive bipartisan support for an even larger welfare state is the central fact of politics in our nation's capital today."

People are ignorant when it comes to politics, except for some political fans who, like the baseball version, enjoy the game. But as George Mason University School of Law professor Ilya Somin writes in "Political Ignorance in America," it is not much worse now than it was in the past. But with government so much bigger, and doing so much more, it is just about impossible for the average citizen to keep up, and so exercise his sovereign responsibilities within a democracy. Somin suggests we begin to solve this by limiting and decentralizing government.

Yale University Press editor at large Steve Wasserman's "In Defense of Difficulty: How the Decline of the Ideal of Seriousness Has Dulled

Democracy in the Name of a Phony Populism" and Foundation for Individual Rights in Education president Greg Lukianoff's "How Colleges Create the 'Expectation of Confirmation'" have similarities to Maggie Jackson's entry. Wasserman argues that the culture doesn't allow for, and rarely admires, difficulty; that it "renders serious reading and cultural criticism increasingly irrelevant, hollowing out habits of attention indispensable for observing long-form narrative and sustained argument." His article is filled with perceptive, memorable quotes from Leon Wieseltier, William Hazlitt, and my favorite, Isaac Asimov: "Anti-intellectualism has been . . . nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge'." Wasserman argues for the exercise of cultural authority, and artistic, literary, and aesthetic discrimination—in a word, judgment. Lukianoff argues that because of the supposed right not to be offended, universities have become "echo chambers" of what students want to hear, and of what faculty wish them to imbibe. Real discussion and actual debate are not to be found. The corrective is the creation of an academic environment conducive to asking tough questions and fostering rigorous, wide-open discussion.

Syndicated radio talk show host and author Dennis Prager's "We Live in the Age of Feelings" and *First Things* editor R.R. Reno's "The New Antinomian Attitude" both suggest new titles for the times. If the fifties and sixties were the Age of Anxiety, Prager's is what his title suggests, while Reno's is the Empire of Desire. Prager finds his designation in the locus of the self, one that knows only what it wants and not what it thinks, or what civilization has thought for thousands of years. Reno takes his designation from the writings of that lost philosopher of the sixties, Norman O. Brown. Brown took from his reading of Freud the notion that for man to find himself, he must overcome the repressive aspects of society and fulfill his own personal desires, no matter how much they contravene society's norms or standards. Prager and Reno see this as elevating the body and its desires above the mind's concepts of rightness, as well as civilizational—Christian or Jewish—constraints. Each person is thus only concerned with personal satisfaction, and of course one must be nonjudgmental regarding the individual "pathways" followed to achieve this goal. Reno and Prager come to a similar conclusion: the only way out of this moral morass is a mass move back to ideas and values, to the high and the noble.

In their afterword to *The State of the American Mind*, Bauerlein and Bellow compare the state of intellectual thought fifty years ago to today, and conclude that no matter how derisive or condemnatory of America they

were, past intellectuals recognized that an American identity, or Mind, existed, and that it had value. Among intellectuals today a desire exists to transcend the American Mind and blend into something universal—the global society we hear so much about—that can be achieved *now*, rather than understanding it as a quality marking the beginning of a future messianic time. In the meantime, "America lies in bits and pieces," like Humpty Dumpty having tumbled off the wall. How will we put it back together again? As claimed in the sixties, it will take a new revolution, perhaps another Great Awakening, if a secular one. The question is, have we the strength, the fortitude, the chutzpah, the will?

PART THREE: CHAPTER 6

THE COMEBACK OF BEAUTIFUL MUSIC: A REVIEW OF ROBERT R. REILLY AND JENS F. LAURSON'S *SURPRISED BY BEAUTY*

The state of the contemporary music world is problematic. For that matter, the general health of music is not good. Or perhaps what I should really say is that the place that classical, or high art, music finds itself in is—almost nowhere.

Audiences are dwindling for concert music presented by our nation's orchestras. CDs or downloads of classical music represent a minuscule component of market share. While there are still music schools and music represented in the academy, its place, like all of the humanities and arts, is at the very margins. Students come to university never having heard of Bach or Beethoven (I kid you not), and they will leave just as musically ignorant. Performers get technically better and better, but in the main, have less and less to say. The market for classical music can seem to handle just one star at a time, similar to the arena of sports. After Yo-Yo Ma is there another cellist? There might have been when Rostropovich was alive, but that is because he had that great Russian street cred. Joshua Bell represents the "younger" generation of violinists, but is hardly as well-known as Isaac Perlman, now a shadow of what he once was. If the performance scene is atrophying, what of the New, of those works being created in our own time or composed in the recent past, meaning the last hundred years, give or take.

You might blanch were you to go to hear a new or recently written piece. Would it be of that unlistenable sort, reminiscent of the fifties, sixties, or seventies, the music of blips and bleeps colloquially known as "squeak-fart music"? Would it go on and on—with little change—as in much minimal music? Or might it provide respite or nourishment for the soul?

At one time music was considered the highest of the arts. Regarded as the revealer of the working of the spheres, as a guide to the soul, music was thought to be man's best way of understanding himself because it addresses the mind, the heart, and the senses. For at its deepest level, every great work of music, unlike almost any other art, is a metaphor for our own life experience, as both have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and reside incorporeally and only in time. Music's ephemerality reminds us at the deepest level of our nature that there is more to us than we can know. It is part of the divine.

But if the past sixty years have been tough, where are we now? Or maybe what we must ask is, were they really so tough, or were we simply not listening? Remember, Bach was dismissed in favor of Telemann in his own time; he didn't receive his due until Mendelssohn resurrected his music in the nineteenth century. So is it possible that the music history of the twentieth century really has yet to be written, that what was purveyed as the only legitimate music, that is, the unlistenable sort, will disappear, or is already in the process of becoming irrelevant? Or are we at least beyond such definitive teleological pronouncements as that of Pierre Boulez, who claimed that any composer who has not experienced the "necessity for the dodecaphonic [twelve-tone] language is USELESS [*sic*]" and "his whole work is irrelevant to the needs of his epoch."[1]

Or finally, have we emerged from the musical experimentation of the twentieth century and maybe, just maybe, come back to our wits and senses?

These questions and this perspective lie at the heart of the new edition of *Surprised by Beauty: A Listener's Guide to the Recovery of Modern Music*, written by Robert R. Reilly, with Jens F. Laurson. I review this book as it is now twice the size of the first edition, published in 2002, and so is an almost entirely new opus. Like many good musical compositions, *Surprised by Beauty* has an introduction, a main body, and a coda, or conclusion. Both introduction and conclusion address the central question of music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: is music meant to be beautiful and/or sacred, or is it meant to present us with a view of the truth of our times—including the state of our embattled inner spirit—and thus possibly revel in ugliness?

[1] Pierre Boulez, "Possibly . . . " (1952), in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, comp. Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh, intro. Robert Piencikowski (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 113.

Reilly comes down on the side of the former. Being an active Roman Catholic, and having written most of his entries in *Surprised by Beauty* for the Catholic magazine *Crisis*, this outlook should not come as a surprise. Reilly also treats the Death of God movement of this period as problematic, as, of course, do many of the composers he cites.

The main section of *Surprised by Beauty* (part 1) is an alphabetic review of composers who represent the "other history" of twentieth-century music, whose works continued to provide perceptible rhythms and structure, recognizable and memorable melodies or motivic materials (a clear if surprising journey), and that unique contribution of Western music, the interweaving of individual lines that together create something we call harmony. The book also includes an addendum, which contains conversations the author has had with various composers or interpreters of their music.

The composers Reilly discusses can be grouped into several categories.

First are the well-known composers, including Samuel Barber, Benjamin Britten, Edward Elgar, Leoš Janáček, Hector Villa-Lobos, Frank Martin, Francis Poulenc, Jean Sibelius, Michael Tippett, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, among others. These names will be recognized by most people who have engaged, at least at some level, in mainstream musical life, in other words, those who regularly attend orchestra or chamber music concerts.

Next we have the composers, living or recently dead, who are leaving or have left a major mark on the music of the twentieth century: John Adams, Stephen Albert, Dominick Argento, John Corigliano, Henryk Górecki, Einojuhani Rautavaara, George Rochberg, Benjamin Lees, and John Tavener, among others.

Then there are those composers who are not well-known, but whose mark is being made as I write, including Kenneth Fuchs, Daniel Strong Godfrey, Stephen Hartke, Jennifer Higdon, Stephen Jaffe, Libby Larsen, Lowell Liebermann, George Tsontakis, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

We must add those whose music was forbidden, composers who were exterminated by the Nazis or Stalin or excommunicated or left in limbo by the European and American avant-garde or Academy. These would include Hans Gál, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Franz Mittler, Othmar Schoeck, Karl Weigl, Mieczysław Weinberg, and Erich Zeisl.

And finally—and this is a small percentage—there are those who wrote nice but less than original music, and whose music should be listened to only if you have exhausted the other possibilities.

The reviews follow a useful pattern. The composer is identified and located in history. His music is then explored in a simple, accessible manner. Reilly often identifies his favorite pieces, and then refers to various recordings, with their relative merits and demerits identified. Thus the entries are formulated to give the interested listener easy access to the music of each composer, with a clear track of greater to lesser, more accessible to less accessible, works. One need not read them in order, but instead dip in serendipitously anywhere in *Surprised by Beauty*.

While Reilly is a devout Catholic, the ghosts of two Jews hover over the book. The first is the twentieth-century nemesis Arnold Schoenberg, who developed the twelve-tone method of composition. The other is George Rochberg, who came to compositional maturity as a twelve-tone composer, later famously abandoned it to reenter the world of his musical forebears, particularly Brahms, Beethoven, and Mahler, and then, at the end of his life, produced a unique synthesis of both.

Schoenberg moved away from tonality because he felt it could no longer contain what he wished to express, that the extension of chromatic harmony had gone as far as it could, and that twelve-tone music is a logical and historical need. Rochberg moved away from twelve-tone music because he felt it did not provide the means for what he wished to say, that it is emotionally too restrictive, and that it is a denial, a cutting off, of the artist from the past, and all that tonality holds in regards to musical memory. Schoenberg was a musical and artistic revolutionary in his early years; he matured as he developed. While as a young man he said that his new method would insure the supremacy of German music for the next one hundred years (by the way, he never held German citizenship), later in life and certainly towards its conclusion Schoenberg wrote tonal music, or "in the old style," as he called it, without any pejorative notion to it. He also did not abjure composers who did not appropriate his method, and found greatness in other composers' music that was tonal.

It was Schoenberg's descendants, namely Boulez and his acolytes, who became downright totalitarian in their understanding of what he had created and, by the way, figuratively killed off their artistic progenitor, as Boulez did when he said "Schoenberg is dead." Why did Boulez say this? Because Schoenberg didn't go *far enough* in ridding his music of any relationship to

the musical past. Boulez and his followers desired a complete break from the past—and a new beginning starting from ground zero.

The composers whose work is discussed in *Surprised by Beauty* sought and seek to be continuers of the tradition. Defying the notion of rupture and a new beginning, they see themselves as individuals upholding and contributing to a great musical tradition. These composers write symphonies, concertos, and sacred music. Most of it is tonal or has strongly tonal elements and is written in known forms and for familiar forces, as in orchestras, string quartets, chamber ensembles, and the like. Surprisingly, however, that imp of the twentieth century, John Cage, does make an appearance, as Reilly finds some of his earlier music of interest.

The structure of the book leaves it open for readers, if they wish, to find fault with Reilly's choice of composers to feature in *Surprised by Beauty*. For example, of the American symphonists, Roy Harris and David Diamond are included, but not Walter Piston, William Schuman, Peter Mennin, o r Vincent Persichetti. Leonard Bernstein and Lukas Foss are not to be found. Reilly shows a certain bias toward second- and third-tier Europeans at the expense of better American composers. The holy minimalists—Arvo Pärt, Górecki, and Tavener—are overly lauded, almost in a supersessionist manner, over their Jewish counterparts, who, while considered pivotal and primary, don't quite seem to have the sacred stuff. And there are a number of younger American composers I would have included instead of those featured, but all this will shake out in the coming years.

A few other minor faults. Reilly loves the word "beguiling," which he employs abundantly. An index would be useful. And, as would and could be expected in a book of this size and encyclopedic nature, a certain sameness sets in if read in large chunks.

For anyone interested and willing to explore the wonders of music of the recent past and present, *Surprised by Beauty* is a fine guide and companion. As Reilly writes in the preface to the second edition, "[I]t's okay: The war is over. You can come out now. The army of noise emptied its lungs screaming its loudest and then whimpered away. Today's composers have returned to tonality, melody, and gorgeous harmonies."

The academic world tends to stick to tried-and-true formulas. After all, established professors are reluctant to rework their notes. But it just might be that the history of the music of the twentieth century will indeed be rewritten by a younger cadre of musicologists and theoreticians, as it already

is by conductors and musicians who are programming and performing the music of these "other" composers. In that regard, this book will be a source and a starting place for those willing to entertain such a change in their understanding of the course of classical music of the recent past.

The famous Jewish sage Hillel told the prospective convert, who asked him to explain the entirety of Torah while standing on one foot, "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you. Now go study." My suggestion is to read *Surprised by Beauty* and then do what Reilly is really asking you to do: now go listen.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 7

COMPOSING HISTORY: A REVIEW OF *THE NOISE OF TIME*

In an exam I give to incoming graduate students in the University of Arizona's music department, I ask what twentieth-century composer wrote fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets. Most know the answer—Dmitri Shostakovich—which wouldn't have been the case for students in the seventies and eighties. Back then, Shostakovich was considered too retrogressive by those in the academy, and too modern for many musicians who played the mainstream repertoire. There was also the question of politics—Shostakovich was considered to be *the* Soviet composer. In the last thirty years or so the edge has dulled, the political question has become marginal, and Shostakovich has again become a highly respected mainstream figure, even if his music isn't played as regularly as that of other twentieth-century Russians such as Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

Like no other composer in history, Shostakovich's days and art were framed and affected by living within a particular and oppressive regime—communism in the Soviet Union—for his entire life. Born in 1906, he was only a boy at the time of the Russian Revolution. He died in 1975, with communism seemingly still in ascendancy. Throughout his lifetime Shostakovich functioned within a totalitarian and murderous society in which composers were seen as extensions of the state; for as Lenin said: "Art belongs to the people." Never before did an artist have to deal with such an overwhelming bureaucracy, one that held all levers of power, that wished to control all creative output, that was willing to censure and kill without provocation or reason.

This relationship between the composer's creative life and the Soviet state has been at the center of the conversation regarding the "meaning" of Shostakovich's music. Does a particular piece correspond with a particular occurrence in his life, and does this affect the music? Do some pieces contain subtle commentary on his "situation"? Can music carry that kind of burden, and can it speak to us in this manner? What are we to make of the

vicissitudes of such an artist's life? These questions are at the center of Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time*, which is called a novel. It is partly that and, in a way, not that at all, but rather a mixture of biographical details of the composer's life and a dramatization of settings and events that either did, or could have, happened. The book is a smooth and absorbing read, but one of its fraught elements is the slippery relationship between fact and fiction.

Barnes was born in Leicester, England, on January 19, 1946, and currently lives in London. He has worked as a reviewer and literary editor, and then as a television critic, for various English magazines and newspapers. He has written novels, short stories, and essays, and won the Man Booker Prize in 2011 for *The Sense of an Ending.* Three other novels of his were shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and he has won many other awards and prizes.

The book's three parts are narrated in a third-person interior monologue and move back and forth in time. Part one, "On the Landing," takes us from Shostakovich's birth to the point when he begins to feel the pressure of Stalin's reign of terror, where he waits nightly at the landing before the elevator, dressed and with his overnight bag, so as not to bother anyone, for the authorities to take him away to interrogate or kill him. Shostakovich's mind wanders to the past as he waits. Memories of his bucolic youth in the country move to reflections upon his first patron, Marshal Tukhachevsky, who keeps Shostakovich safe until his own demise, when he is murdered by the state in one of its numerous and convulsive purges. The narrator ruminates on Shostakovich's modest character, his retreat into self (as all artists must do to create), and his early bout of tuberculosis, for which he must spend time at a sanatorium where he meets his first, short-lived love.

Shostakovich began playing the piano at nine, struck gold with his first symphony at the tender age of nineteen, and first got into big trouble with the authorities at thirty with his only opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. By this point in the narrative, some artistic friends and patrons have already been shot by the state, and Shostakovich understands that his life and career are provisional and continue at the whim of Stalin and his henchmen. That he is able to compose under such extreme psychological pressure is an extraordinary feat: "From now on there would be only two types of composer: those who were alive and frightened; and those who were dead."

Part two, "On the Plane," takes place as Shostakovich and his artistic brethren return from the Cultural and Scientific Congress for World Peace, a propaganda effort sponsored by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in New York in March 1949. This setting allows for more reverie, including reflecting on his survival of World War II, during which the hounding of artists diminished as the Soviet Union fought for its own survival, and on his denunciation thereafter by the state-controlled Union of Composers, who take him to task for indulging in "unhealthy individualism" and "pessimism" in his Eighth Symphony.

Part two also recounts a telephone conversation between Stalin and Shostakovich that is part of the historical record, although not perhaps in the detail presented by the narrator. Shostakovich has declined the invitation of the Union of Composers to attend the congress. Stalin has called to "help" him change his mind. Shostakovich is supposed to attend as the USSR's foremost composer, and is expected to praise the glories of Soviet music and the political structure that promotes it, despite the ban on his music at home. During the conversation Shostakovich bargains for two items: that his music be unbanned, and that he be given a "tail-suit" to wear so that he will look proper if he performs on piano or conducts one of his pieces. Stalin agrees to both, stating that the banning of the performance of his music was surely a "mistake" and that it is likely that a tailor can be found to make him such a garment.

Shostakovich finds the conference "to be a place of the purest humiliation, and of moral shame" as he reads speeches that he has not written that contain homages to the greatness of music in the Soviet Union and that vilify the West, including his hero Stravinsky, who lived his life in exile, in Western Europe and then the United States, following the Russian Revolution. There are also "tangential" musings, when Shostakovich considers suicide, the limits of irony in a totalitarian society, and that same society's hatred of poetry and theater, since those arts put a mirror up to the face of despotic barbarism. He admires those who confront power head-on, but he cannot follow this path himself. Shostakovich is scared to die and to put his friends and family in jeopardy, and he recognizes himself as a coward. Throughout these musings Shostakovich chastises those in the West who are his supporters and gentle adversaries, and vilifies those who champion or bolster the Soviet regime—those who want more of him as an artist and those who are dupes of communism. His supporters and fans revere his music but simply do not understand the constraints under which he works. None among such people recognize "the one simple fact about the

Soviet Union: that it was impossible to tell the truth here and live." One passage strikes at the heart of any artist:

> In the imaginary conversations he sometimes had with these disappointed supporters, he would begin by explaining one small, basic fact of which they were almost certainly ignorant: that it was impossible in the Soviet Union to buy manuscript paper unless you were a member of the Union of Composers. Did they know that? Of course not.

Part three, "In the Car," takes place toward the end of Shostakovich's life as he is being chauffeured about by a state-provided driver. He recalls how he witnessed Lenin's return to Russia in 1917, has outlived Stalin and Khrushchev, who died in 1953 and 1964, and is now an honored citizen artist of the Soviet state. He thinks of all the awards he has garnered, including six Stalin prizes and three Orders of Lenin. Given what Shostakovich has gone through, a reader might imagine him thinking, as Charles Ives did, that "prizes are for boys."[1]

Shostakovich is also fêted with honors from the West and meets Stravinsky upon the latter's return visit to the motherland in 1962. But what he remembers most vividly is when, under Khrushchev, he is asked to be chairman of the Union of Composers, which entails one small matter—Shostakovich must, after all these years, become a member of the Party. He accedes in 1960, to his great moral shame, as he is old, tired, and spent. It is among the last in a long line of shameful acts in order to remain alive and to be allowed to compose.

All three parts of *The Noise of Time* are framed by states of transit. This is also the nature of real music, which is an art form defined by movement—from beginning to middle to conclusion—and thus is a three-part metaphor for our lives. We live as best we can and the composer creates music as best he can. Shostakovich knew he wasn't the most moral of men, but that he *was* a composer of some moment. All he wanted from life was to write music, love, and be left alone. His music said all he had to say. "When listening to his own music, he would sometimes cover his mouth with his hands, as if to say: Do not trust what comes out of my mouth, trust only what goes into your ears."

The book's title is referenced in two contexts. In the first, music and art are described as that which rises above the pervasive clutter of the world:

[1] See Harold C. Schonberg, *Lives of the Great Composers*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 562.

"Art is the whisper of history, heard above the noise of time." The second is similar: "What could be put up against the noise of time? Only that music which is inside ourselves—the music of our being—which is transformed by some into real music. Which, over the decades, if it is strong and true and pure enough to drown out the noise of time, is transformed into the whisper of history." The hope of every artist is that his work will be among that which survives the test of time: "History, as well as biography would fade. . . . And then, if it still had value—if there were still ears to hear—his music would be . . . just music. That was all a composer could hope for."

"Just music"? *The Noise of Time* gives the lie to that possibility in totalitarian regimes, where art must serve "the people" and the production of the artist is calculated on a basis similar to that of a factory worker—and life and art are always in jeopardy. Shostakovich wrote much music that will stand the test of time, and some that just did the job necessary at the time. It is impossible for a composer's music not to reflect in some sense his internal state at the time of its composition. Or is it? The act of composition may allow the composer to rise above, or even transcend, the physical and mental travail he is experiencing. So finally, the music must be experienced, and judged, as nothing other than music. While this book leads us through the mind of Shostakovich, as imagined by Barnes, it is Shostakovich's music that allows us to understand his heart. I hope that readers of this handsome book will be encouraged to engage the music itself, perhaps starting with those fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 8

HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE: A REVIEW OF *THE END OF COLLEGE*

Anyone working in the groves of academe knows that things can't continue as they are. As the sagacious economist Herbert Stein famously said, "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop." The bubble of higher education will burst. It is only a matter of when.

Students are learning less and less. Bureaucratization and the new legalistic mentality are overwhelming the daily functioning of institutions—see any syllabus, which has now become a legal contract rather than a plan of study. It is impossible to do anything quickly and efficiently, with the possible exception of getting new courses devoid of content added to the curriculum. Universities are now "communities" interested in sustainability, diversity (except in intellectual inquiry), exploration of new social possibilities, physical and mental wellness, sexual experimentation, and general indoctrination of a leftist sort. While the educational product and results are getting worse, the cost of "the college experience" is rising exponentially—student debt now tops a trillion dollars. A good chunk of that was, and is, accrued to students who early on dropped out of formal education, so the likelihood of its being paid back is small.

The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere, by Kevin Carey, director of the Education Policy Program at New America, tries to make sense of this situation and argues that there will be, and already are, alternatives to this bleak scenario. Carey's conceit is in his subtitle: *Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere*. The digital age has come to the rescue—so adapt or go the way of the dodo bird. We have heard this before in various iterations, and pushed each version aside as yet another doomsday scenario. But my sense is that Carey is correct, and that everyone involved in higher education had better open his eyes and take a good look toward the future. While the digital age is wreaking havoc in numerous ways, such as in our students' reduced

attention spans and inability to focus, it is Carey's contention that some of these digital instrumentalities can be our salvation as well.

This breezy, approachable book has twelve chapters with titles such as "The Secret of Life," "Cathedrals," "Thunder Lizards," "Less Like a Yacht," and its last, "Your Children and the University of Everywhere." Carey charts the history of higher education from its beginnings in Europe to the multiversity in America, and discusses the new for-profits, online programs, MOOCs, and business experiments popping up with regularity. He records the entrance of Silicon Valley and its disruptive ventures into the realm of higher education. Carey posits the "University of Everywhere," where "educational resources that have been scarce and expensive for centuries will be abundant and free. Anything that can be digitized . . . will be available to anyone in the world with an Internet connection. . . . It won't . . . be a single place or institution at all. . . . Traditional college credentials . . . will fade into memory." It sounds utopian, and a healthy skepticism of this vision is warranted. Carey, however, makes the case for his brave new educational world.

In current institutions of higher learning, a large number of students are not learning at all, as Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa document in *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2011). Carey cites their appalling finding that "45 percent of students made no gains on a widely used test of critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and communication skills during their first two years in college. Thirty-six percent made no statistically significant gains over the entire four years." This does not include the 25 percent or so who drop out during their first two years of college.

Why is this happening? According to Arum and Roksa, students study at a very low rate—approximately five hours per week, whereas just fifteen years ago that figure was fifteen hours, down from forty in the early 1960s. Marry this with grade inflation and you have a perfectly ridiculous situation: Students don't learn but they get good grades. Students and faculty have plenty of time to pursue their primary interests, which for students means partying, watching sports and Netflix, playing video games, finding themselves, and just having a good time. And for faculty it means carrying on with their "research." It is a win-win in the short term for those involved and, in the long term, a major loss for society, for democracy, and ultimately for the students themselves.

In chapter 2, "Sham, a Bauble, and a Dodge," Carey summarizes how we arrived at our current state. Education began with the bringing together of learners and those thought to hold a certain amount of wisdom for the exploration and explication of questions of moment. Picture the Hellenic Plato and the Jewish Rabbi Akiva. Teaching was done through oral presentations, persuasion, and rhetoric. This changed with the printing press. While books could still be pricey, they became the sources of information that could be collected into large libraries, repositories of information available to "members," who paid for access to those materials, and faculty who had mastered, at the very least, bits of it.

This changed in the nineteenth century with the creation of the American university, which added three new aspects to what had been a primarily religious education: *research*, after the German archetype; *practical skills*, which were needed for workers in the Industrial Age; and *a shift in focus* from religious studies to the broader realm of the humanities. Moreover, higher education, which had been reserved for the few, was gradually democratized and opened up to the greater population, to the point that college education is now thought of as a right for all.

Carey presents Jacques Barzun's grand critique of this hybrid comprising "the graduate research university and the undergraduate liberal arts college." The American hybrid university's mission is unclear and unfocused, trying to fulfill various goals at once, and not doing a good job of any of them. It hires faculty for their research skills and then expects them to teach, something they have never been prepared to do. So it has, according to Barzun, "left decisions about teaching . . . in the hands of autonomous academic departments and individual professors who operated from the principle of keeping themselves employed." According to Carey, "When it comes to teaching, colleges and universities *do not want to be more productive*, and will do whatever they can to avoid such a fate" (emphasis in original).

How are they allowed to do this in our age of increased efficiency in almost all endeavors? The answers are public subsidy, regulation, and credentialization. Some public subsidy is the responsibility of society to educate the young, but when institutions fail to carry out that trust, Carey asserts that the public has a right to turn off the flow of money. The beast will thus be starved into correcting its errant behavior, and in this new world this is already happening with a vengeance.

Carey takes a MOOC offered through EdX, a joint MIT and Harvard enterprise: "The Secret of Life," a course required of all MIT undergraduates. As background, he mentions the convergence of artificial intelligence and education.

The increasing sophistication of AI programs can track a learner's progress, provide and adjust the manner of the teaching methodology to the particular learner, and then allow students to proceed only when they have mastered the current material. Most learning—particularly in the sciences—is progressive.[1]

Carey tracks his experience with this course throughout the book. He finds the course, which includes videos of all lectures, well done. Money was not an issue in putting it together, although it typically costs a lot for the staff and equipment to run such classes: two HD cameras to record all lectures, a bevy of IT guys to create and maintain the site, as well as administrators to answer questions and supervise chat rooms, etc. It presupposes, or makes the case for, a master teacher who would put lesser academics out of business, or at least thrust them into a supportive role.

At one point Carey goes to Boston (he lives in Washington, D.C.) to participate in a live lecture. His response to the experience is humorous: "[L]ive and taped lectures really aren't the same. Live lectures are definitely worse. . . . [T]here's a lot to be said for the Pause button." He mentions the distractions that are found in the lecture hall and conversely the superb quality of production of the cameramen. "I much preferred sitting down to watch lectures at a time and place of my choosing, headphones on, notebook in hand."

If courses can be taken online, decoupled from an institution (anyone, anywhere in the world can sign up for the MIT offering, and for a nominal fee), and one can get a grade for participation, the only remaining issue becomes one of credentialization. Put another way, what does a diploma actually tell us? Carey points out that with the requirement to take a certain number of "hours" of courses, and with grade inflation, what a diploma now

[1] For a decidedly critical view of this aspect of Carey's case for digital innovation, massive open online courses, see Rachelle DeJong Peterson, "MOOC Fizzles," *Academic Questions* 27, no. 3 (September 2014): 316–19; and "Flailing at Windmills," review of *Higher Education in the Digital Age*, by William G. Bowen," 342–46, in that same issue. To read about one professor's experience in designing and teaching a MOOC, see Daniel Bonevac, "MOOCs: The Director's Cut," *Academic Questions* 29, no. 1 (March 2016): 59–67.

represents is not much more than, to use Robert Maynard Hutchins's phrase, "faithfulness, docility, and memory." Carey makes a good case for a move to a decentralized system of badges that will inform about what the student actually learned rather than account for time invested.

Carey is onto something big. At the same time, there are hurdles. Aside from the huge dropout rate for online courses, this brave new world is custom-made for the sciences and maybe even the social sciences, but comes up lacking in terms of the arts and humanities, which, after all, teach sense and sensibility.

The University of Everywhere also doesn't address matters pertaining to history or citizenship, the virtues that undergird our democratic society. It does well with matters of data and information acquisition, but will fail in purveying what we quaintly used to call *wisdom*. It also begs the question of whether virtual community is the same as real community, and whether education is aided by a presentness, a physical association, the near proximity of learners. Students are not just brains, but made of flesh and emotions. Will the University of Everywhere address the whole person? Or maybe Carey is telling us that the University of Everywhere will only purvey matters of information and leave some other bodies and institutions—families, churches and synagogues, community centers, neighborhood gymnasiums—to address everything else, from character formation to hobbies to sports attendance to political affiliation. Given the current state of our institutions of higher education, maybe this isn't a bad way to go.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 9

TO PRAISE THE PRIZE? THE MUSIC OF ANDREW NORMAN AND HANS ABRAHAMSEN

Prizes in the arts are a curious phenomenon of modern times. As far as I know, neither Beethoven nor Leonardo received any. Bach pretty much worked for pay and in praise of God. Ives said "prizes were for boys." Yet today it is hard to turn around without seeing some new prize for an artistic production or product.

In music there are older ones like the Rome Prize usually given to younger composers to provide time just for writing. The award is given on the basis of a body of work that suggests promise. In contrast, the Pulitzer Prize in Music, first given in 1943 to William Schuman, is for a specific work first performed in a given year which, in the estimation of the judges, rises above all the others. As with all human enterprises, besides taste and aesthetic judgment, politics and professional clubbiness are inherent to the process.

The Grawemeyer Awards, with one in music, were founded by H. Charles Grawemeyer, industrialist, entrepreneur, astute investor and philanthropist, at the University of Louisville in 1984. Each recipient receives $100,000. (The Pulitzer by contrast is a paltry ten grand.) The first award was presented in 1985 and, like the Pulitzer, it is for a single work rather than for life-long achievement.

Like most prizes or awards, some selections will be better than others. Anomalies will sneak in, and there certainly are, have been, and will be, one-piece composers.

Sometimes a fine work is created early on with nothing much to follow. And sometimes works are selected that just aren't that great but represent something of the zeitgeist of the time. This is all reflected in the compositions of the last two winners of the Grawemeyer Award for Music,

Andrew Norman and Hans Abrahamsen, and their respective pieces, *Play* and *let me tell you why.*

Andrew Norman, youngish at thirty-nine, has a good educational pedigree. He attended the University of Southern California and then the Yale School of Music, and now is back on the faculty at USC. He has had numerous high-profile commissions and performances, and was a Rome Prize winner. He is judged quiet and introverted, and possesses a good degree of self-doubt, an unusual quality for a composer these days.

Play is an ambitious work for orchestra. It is brash, energetic, and a bit vulgar. While not a symphony at all, it is in three quasi movements, called "Levels 1, 2, and 3," after the language of video games. There are sections and materials that are up to the discretion of the conductor, who handles more than just the niceties of tempi and interpretation, but also decides on placement of materials in time. Thus while the work is in closed form—it has a predetermined beginning, middle, and an end—it has sections that are constructed, during the performance itself, and thus are "open" in form. In the wonderful recording by the Boston Modern Orchestra Music Project, conducted by Gil Rose, it clocks in at forty-six minutes.

Norman says "that the symphony orchestra is for me an instrument that needs to be experienced live. It is a medium as much about human energy as it is about sound, as much about watching choices being made and thoughts exchanged and feats of physical coordination performed as it is about listening to the melodies and harmonies and rhythms that result from those actions." It is a funny idea, really, harkening back to the 1970s notion that music is really about social interaction rather than the ideas expressed as music. Championed by such composers as Christian Wolff, it put process before artistic object.

"The title of each movement winks at the world of video games . . . as if each depicted a scenario of ascending difficulty." Video games are thus the new muse, a new paradigm for the arts. I think them a form of entertainment and not an art. My students tell me they are on their way to becoming the latter, but I find this assessment unlikely. If the medium is the message, it is superficial and banal.

Norman is clear about the architecture of the work, describing it as being driven by both individual melodic lines and a broad chorus of diffuse melodic motion—it is both "goal-oriented" and "open-ended" in video-game terms. But Norman can't have it both ways. He wants to create a

symphonic structure with material and procedures that are more suited to a Roadrunner and Coyote cartoon. *Play* is a huge tempest about things that just don't matter. It is ironic and flat, perfect for those without any relationship to music of more than the immediate past, or through a connection to the superficial world of pop music. It is caught in the present with all of its clichés and banalities.

Norman has craft, chops, and musical instincts that can't be taught. He needs now to find something to say. To do so, he must drop his guard and find something richer than the world of video games as his muse. He needs to find himself, and grow into a composer who has something important to tell us. Then he will produce music worth listening to a second time. *Play* isn't that.

Hans Abrahamsen is one of the leading composers of the European generation in their mid 60s. Danish by nationality, his output is small but well considered. He too is of good pedigree, having studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, and with the noted composers Per Nørgård and György Ligeti. He is known for taking compositional "breaks" to ponder his next step and also for having a sense of self-doubt. His style is modern, not postmodern. He aims for emotional depth and range, yet his music is restrained, a little chilly.

let me tell you why (*lmtyw*) was written in 2013 for the vocal phenomenon Barbara Hannigan and the Berlin Philharmonic, and is based on texts by Paul Griffiths which are taken from the eponymous novel written in 2008. The texts are vague, but then again they are supposed to be. As Tom Payne wrote in the *Guardian*,

> In the book he (Griffiths) tells Ophelia's story, using only the words that Ophelia speaks in Hamlet. But Ophelia doesn't say all that much, and much of her most interesting vocabulary comes from the snatches of old songs she chants as she heads for the willow—shaded brook. Griffiths pulls off some fine tricks, and shows how much of her speech can be chopped up and made to sound like Beckett, or the Beatles (she quotes *Love Me Do* verbatim), or Oscar Wilde. There are the rhythms of recognizable nursery rhymes throughout.

There is play going on of a tongue-in-cheek sort. The libretto is enigmatic, wan, allusive, dull, juvenile, and feckless. It is suggestive of what might be called "Eurosclerosis," a boredom with, and a going through the motions of, life. We are not far from the world of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*.

Part I of the piece is an exploration of words, memories, and then music and time. The themes of Part II are music and night, then light and glass (as a reflector of light, and now in relation to the lover). Part III moves from the lover to snow/winter—to an almost soullessness, but one of a begrudging drudgery, with the final line "I will go on."

Hannigan's voice and vocal line drive the music. Hers is an exquisite voice, which can be light or dark, gentle or richly dramatic. Her almost non-attacks on the highest of notes must be heard to be believed. Her instrument is not always used to its best advantage though, as throughout the cycle Abrahamsen uses an adaptation of a Monteverdian technique: a rebounding on one note, which is not an attractive gesture. The Symphony of the Bavarian Radio, under the direction of Andris Nelsons, plays with a full range of colors and dynamics. Only sometimes are they ponderous or heavy-handed.

Abrahamsen's language is that of an extended tonality: there are frequently tonal references and even certain pitches that become central. If there is one underlying problem with this work, however, it is that it aims for movement but has trouble supplying it because there is no harmonic motion to be found. For example, in movements that are fast and suggest quick motion, what actually is heard is a fast gyration, or a trembling in place; the body is all aquiver but the feet just can't seem to move.

The composition begins and ends with high piccolos, harp, celesta, and strings that are in a descending scalar pattern, but the instruments are out of sync and "wrong" notes are occasionally interspersed. It sounds familiar, but just a little off-kilter.

Movement is slow, almost glacial. To words that have a Glassian lack of connection or meaning, the music is calm, introspective, and ethereal. Texts are mostly presented syllabically, and the atmosphere is one of lightness combined with deep gravity, as if the world presented is made solely of the highest atmosphere and hardest ground below. There is maybe something in the mist. Movement Two, about music and memory, starts fast, burbling and babbling, dappled and scintillating. The second of its three verses is slow and ethereal, with the register moving from high to low, bright to dark. The vocal line is not particularly memorable, although Hannigan makes some gorgeous swoops. The third section, all about time ("Time of now . . . time turned and loosed, time bended Time blown up here and there"), is again slow. It is bleak, portentous, and tedious.

The Lover comes into play in Part II. The first movement is quite short at only two minutes, and is again slow and desultory. (This musical tone makes a particularly odd setting for the final line of text: "your face is my music lesson and I sing.") In the second movement, by contrast, the texts suggest joy and ecstasy, but the vocal line is skittish. The rhythm is bouncy, and the orchestration tries to be jovial as well, but it is too heavy and thick to achieve this emotional state. A high texture surrounds the final line of text, "turned me to light"; it should glisten, but it doesn't.

lmtyw almost succeeds but doesn't quite deliver the goods. There is never a real melody to be heard, one that opens up and pulls at the heart. It never overcomes its problem of pace, so a rhythmic and melodic sameness sets in. Whereas *Play* alternates between hysteria and utter bleakness, *lmtyw* occupies a muddled mid-ground. In Mahler's work, a background force, there is a large span of emotion from capricious joy to utter sadness. *lmtyw* is too constrained to fully satisfy. It is desultory, not realizing any strong emotional statement—emotionally out of focus (like a mediocre Renoir), disconnected, almost somnolescent.

Play is thoroughly American in its playfulness, and completely juvenile as well. Its primitive superficiality is representative of its time and much of what passes for high music in our current culture. Don't forget this is an age in which the downtown musical goddess Laurie Anderson can write a piece, on commission no less, for dogs. *lmtyw* is earnest and attractive, but it can't seem to shake a quality of boredom and lethargy.

Both works have moments of beauty, but they are few and far between. I fear the Grawemeyer got it wrong, as there is thoroughly successful music out there, worthy of being rewarded as such. Hopefully they will find it in the coming year.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 10

REVIEW OF BARRY HOLTZ'S *RABBI AKIVA: SAGE OF THE TALMUD*

Barry Holtz is a storyteller, educator, translator, and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He has also demonstrated his mastery of writing books, with previous works that include seminal texts such as *Your Word Is Fire* (with Arthur Green- 2012), *Back to the Sources* (1986), *Finding Our Way* (1990), *The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books* (1992), and *Textual Knowledge* (2012). Trained in English literature, Holtz's *Rabbi Akiva: Sage of the Talmud* (2017), rounds out his already well developed oeuvre, with a good story.

Holtz approaches the history of his subject through rabbinic sources and anecdotes. Akiva was born around 50 A.D. and died around eighty years later, yet nothing is known of his parents or where he lived his life. This is therefore an intellectual biography that relies on interactions with others—his wife, his students, his community of fellow rabbis—that shed light on the man and his thought, with little actual biography. Holtz's use of the word "portrait" is most telling. A portrait is, after all, the way one man is rendered by another, which is far different from the verisimilitude that a photograph might provide. This portrait provides a sense of the emotional landscape, the inner sense of the man.

The first chapter, "Akiva's World," reviews the period from the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians to the following exile and return of the Jews eighty years later. Herod became king with the support of the Romans in 40 B.C., ending over a century of Hasmonean rule. His reign was marked by the expansion of the Second Temple and Jerusalem. If Akiva was born in Jerusalem at this time, he found himself in a cosmopoli- tan and wealthy center of the world. A new institution, the synagogue, was just forming, which may have had multiple purposes, including a space for praying and for reading the Torah, studying, and meeting. But what did it mean to be a Jew then? It was a nation and a people who worshiped one God, in the Temple in Jerusalem, and followed the laws of the Torah. This was radically altered after the destruction of the

Second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., which engendered questions of an existential nature: "Where was God and what was God's power in light of the disaster? What is the meaning of worship in a world without the temple? How can the Torah be understood in the aftermath of this tragedy? These were among the most powerful issues that would confront Akiva during his lifetime." Akiva was not alone in trying to answer these questions. The new term "rabbi" was applied perhaps to fifty to one hundred men. It was a flexible designation, connoting someone who thought well. It was applied to a loose band of men and was non-hierarchical, informal, and non-institutional. They might have met in a wealthy patron's home or a public gathering place; or maybe the rabbis themselves were well-to-do and formed a kind of aristocracy. "In essence," Holtz writes, "the 'rabbis' were simply a small circle of friends."

The first Talmudic mention of Akiva states that he only began the study of Torah at age forty. Everything prior to that is of no concern. He was an unschooled man of the earth who could not read or write, but after studying for twenty years, no one knew more than he. He was a genius just waiting to happen, who quickly confounded his teachers with his brilliance and brought a new way of interpretation to the Torah. This method includes a detailed "interrogation of Torah, interpretation at its deepest and . . . at its most optimistic core."

A second biographical story is more romantic. A wealthy young woman spied him as a young shepherd and understood his talent. She betrothed herself to him—against all societal norms—married him, and lived in poverty while he went away to study. Only when he returned after twenty-four years as the leading rabbi of his generation was he reunited with his wife and finally accepted by his father-in-law. These biographical traditions are at odds with each other, but have some overlap. In both, Akiva is poor and without ancestry or a family name. His learning and mastery of texts make him a man of importance. Thus begins the Jewish paradigm of acquiring knowledge for its own sake.

Akiva's "growth as a scholar" was not easy. He was antagonistic to scholars in his younger years and made mistakes in his formative stages, not realizing that "Jewish practice may not always conform to one's understanding of the 'right' thing." One cannot rely on intuition, but must join in the conversation, and be around learned people and imitate them. Jewish learning is about a way of being, "a way of thinking and a way of living." Scholarly relations are not always gentle, as even a beginner can challenge a master. In one Talmudic reference Akiva is referred to as a

"forgiving person," while another famous teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, is not. It would seem Akiva had a deep spiritual and modest nature to go along with his brilliance. He was both a student and a teacher at the same time, but at some moment became one of the sages, if not the sage.

"Among the Rabbis" presents Akiva's mature years. One of his major contributions was to suggest that Torah study required attention to every detail of the text. Talmudic stories tend to emphasize his interpretive creativity and compassion, and to balance two aspects of rabbinic culture: the need for both authority and to respect minority opinions. Judaism is as much about the discussion, or the intellectual journey, as it is about the final conclusion. Akiva forges a new paradigm for status, replacing money and family with intellectual ability and accomplishment.

"In the Orchard" presents a mysterious story, recounted in numerous sources, about a mystical vision had by four rabbis in an "orchard." The other three are damaged as a result, while Akiva returns unscathed and enlightened. For Holtz, the question is: "Who is the Akiva who emerges from the various traditions of the *pardes* [Hebrew for orchard] story?" Akiva's survival puts him among a select group, maybe only with Moses, who saw the back of God, or spoke to Him "face to face." He is a spiritual master who obtained insights into the workings of Divinity. Not only is he the ultimate scholar, but also "the role model for all those down through Jewish history who wish to attain that kind of intimate and direct connection to the divine."

While little is known of Akiva's middle years, there are detailed stories of his death, which is assumed to have taken place in the early part of the second century A.D. The Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135 A.D, looms large because, while there is nothing in the historical record, many legends connect the two. With the crushing of the rebellion, the teaching of Torah was banned. Akiva continued to do so, and was caught by the Romans. While his flesh was raked by iron combs, he recited the Shema, thus asserting two things: "his religious commitment and at the same time rejecting the legitimacy of the Roman kingdom for the kingdom of God." He followed this with an interpretation of the Torah, thus ending his life with a teaching moment, an act central to his understanding of what Judaism is.

Akiva has lived on for almost two thousand years in the memories of his people. He pushed for study, argumentation, and the doing of good deeds. The order of priority of these was left undecided and is still a matter for

discussion. He left us with the great principle of the Torah, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and with his passionate yearning for a connection to the Divine.

Akiva is remembered as the rabbi who was martyred, but whose final words were redemptive; or as the scholar who set the path for Jewish existence through the millennia. Holtz offers a third possibility:

> I think of him among the sages, part of that small community. . . of teachers and disciples, arguing, conversing, agreeing, and disagreeing, sitting at meals, at prayer, or teaching and learning . . . .

That multi-vocal assembly of voices recognizes Akiva's genius, but he is not the only teacher, and at times he is in fact a student. This is where Akiva shines, where his heart sings—in the give and take of learning and debate part of a community of companions, even the ones with whom he disagrees a man in the community of the sages, talking about Torah, setting the stage for the future.

This is a warm-hearted, clear, and elegant meditation on the legacy of Akiva. It is almost Talmudic in that.

Part Three: Chapter 11

Abraham and Isaac

In the Fall of 2013 I wrote my first posting for the *Huffington Post*. It happened as a result of serendipity, as my daughter's best friend was dating a then young *Huffington Post* editor. When I mentioned to him the talk I was giving around the country, *Breath in a Ram's Horn*, about the relationship between classical music and Judaism, he thought it would be of interest to his readership, particularly as it would appear at the time of the Jewish holidays. And in such a small way began my many ruminations and musings since then.

It is the same time of year, and the Jewish holidays have just passed. It was an intense twenty-two days of introspection and many hours of praying. In the midst of all of this prayer are the usual biblical readings of the story of Abraham and Isaac, the father and son, and first two fathers of the Jewish people. I was asked to give a presentation this year and decided to focus on these stories. I had been reading and meditating for a long while on the book *Inheriting Abraham* (2012) by Jon Levenson. While his book is about Abraham as the father of the three monotheistic faith traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, I for obvious reasons focused on his comments about the Jewish understanding of these men and their stories. In the following all quotes are from Levenson's book, and my comments may be considered a midrash (commentary) on his understanding of Abraham, his story, and its meaning for us.

The Jewish Community is one of Law—or Faith, emotional connections, and a relationship established through mutual interaction in various proscribed ways—for example, through prayer, or celebrations, and the like. This is at least in part what a community is. We can of course add other aspects—- meals, or humor, but these are to be understood as somewhat ancillary to the central nature of the enterprise.

We might say that the Jewish community is predicated on a tri-partite structure. It begins with Abraham, who provided us with *faith* and *deed*—

moves to Moses, and the *revelation* at Mount Sinai; and finally to us, the People, or the *practitioners*.

We can speak of the initial journey or preamble, that creates the Family, the Tribe, and the Promise, because the creation of this people was not without a purpose. This is followed by Revelation or the Sinaitic Experience, in which all of the people participated, with their consent, to take part in this grand journey, and for all time. It finds its fulfillment in the History of this Idea, and in the body of the History of the People. In this, it replicates our own unique life experiences. An idea is born, comes to, or as with Abraham, is thrust upon, one. We take it up with pleasure and joy, and even commitment, to see it through. It unfolds through time, until our lives are over, but there is a joy in knowing that it lives on for future generations and in others.

At the beginning of our story, Abraham is called to separate himself from his country and kinfolk, and sent into a kind of exile, like the expulsion from the garden of Eden. But the man without a country is told he will inherit a whole land; that the man with a barren wife will have plenteous offspring; that the man who has cut himself off from kith and kin will be pronounced blessed by all the families of the earth.

We must ask the question: Why did God single out Abraham and subsequently the people Israel? We are told that . . . the chosenness of Israel derives from an act of passion, God's passion for them or for their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom he swore an inviolable oath. Passion is not rational. It often creates or suggests actions, which may then have a rational reason for their performance. But like a primary directive of Judaism—do and you will then understand (in that order)—passion is an emotion that precedes understanding. This specialness and uniqueness was not initially predicated on our ancestors fulfilling any mission. Or was it? The people's existence is due to God's providence and not anything they do. Israel is a blessed nation. They might be punished for evil doing, but the relationship, or the Covenant, can never be torn completely asunder.

This new people comes into existence only through God's promise to Abraham, a childless man with a barren wife. The Bible consistently assumes a unique dependence of the special people upon God—as He takes the place of a lost or absent parent.

Chosenness in this context and sense, is not genetic, or a matter of racism. It rests on a paradox—it is a community of shared faith and not

descent. Yet, it is also not that, but based on the idea of a natural family, but with a supernatural mandate. Abraham shall become a blessing, and so will the Jewish people. The concept of Chosenness, and the concomitant notion of faith *in*, or to be blessed *by,* is the blessing of Abraham that becomes a blessing for all his descendants.

Does faith in God and his promises require in its beneficiaries a stance of quietism and passivity, or the opposite stance of human initiative and activism to help bring about the promised result? Foundational elements include the Preservation of Life, Freedom, Trust and Obedience to God. In the Covenant no obligations are imposed on the human partner. Is this so? Are we not specifically told how to behave? If we obey God's commands we will be blessed; if not, cursed. The problem or question is one about time and perhaps the existential relationship between the Jewish people and God. If the people misbehave, God will indeed punish, like any good parent. But unlike the parent-child relationship, in this case there is an omnipotent "parent" who doesn't die, so the relationship will always exist, and thus the people must always exist. God has obligations to the Jewish people for all time, even if we behave badly.

And thus we arrive at our first Biblical reading for Rosh Hashana. We're given much of the back story. Abraham and Sarah, assuming that they themselves will not conceive, make the decision for Abraham to take Hagar as a wife, for her to conceive. And since she is Sarah's handmaiden, the ensuing child will in effect be Sarah's. This is very much an example of being proactive. God has determined, but since the result has not occurred, Abraham and Sarah take steps to make it happen. Hagar is truly a wife, having been raised to that stature. Thus lineage derives from her as well, and so she too is the matriarch of a great nation—but not a "chosen" or covenantal nation.

We then pick up with our story as "the Lord took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which god had spoken." It is important to note here that *God made this happen*- namely it is an act of divine intervention, not exactly an immaculate conception, but done only with the hand of God. It is done outside the realm of the norm, the natural. In the birth of the son as promised, the child is born because of God's promise *alone*, and no human assistance is necessary or even permissible.

Both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at the prospect of a birth of a son of their own. Is this perhaps the beginning of Jewish humor? Or did they laugh in joy? Isaac is circumcised and weaned. Previously it is made clear that both children, Ishmael and Isaac, will inherit the Abrahamic promise but only Isaac the Abrahamic covenant with God. This is important because the promise of the land to be inherited is within the covenant.

Later the relationship between Sarah and Hagar deteriorates, and the rivalry between them and their children escalates. Sarah asks Abraham to "cast out" Hagar and Ishmael, and Abraham is aggrieved at the thought. But God intervenes and tells Abraham to do as his wife says, assuring him that the boy and his mother will survive—but not just survive. God says, "As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed." This clarification goes out of its way to stress Ishmael's rightful inheritance of the Abrahamic promise of blessing, fertility and great nationhood, if not covenant itself.

After initial difficulties in the desert, we are told at the end of the Hagar and Ishmael story that they thrive and "his mother got him a wife from Egypt." We might ask: Why Egypt? Remember that this ties together the scenes from the past, that include Abraham and Sarah's visit there, wherein Sarah ended up in Pharaoh's Palace, and to the future of Hebrew slavery.

We see in this story so far that "human actions and deeds are important for the divine-human relationship, but not exhaustive of it. The relationship transcends obedience or disobedience. There is a dimension of grace and mercy; the granting by God of a second chance." We see that "human effort and divine grace are not inevitably opposed to each other but can operate in tandem."

The binding of Isaac, also known as the *Aqedah*, is a story that shows Abraham to be a paragon of obedience and steadfast faithfulness in God, and love of God. Or, in the post-Enlightenment philosophical understanding, "Abraham is a paragon of unethical behavior, moral failure, religious fanaticism, and much else, all of it very bad."

Let us begin to try to "understand" the *Aqedah*. First and foremost to note is that it comes out of nowhere. The "Test" is unprovoked—it just happens. It is sprung on Abraham. He has no time to, or doesn't, think. No pondering occurs. He doesn't say, "Hey, what is going on here. This can't be part of the plan as I understand it." He doesn't argue with God as he did before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He quietly proceeds to act

upon God's request. The key to interpreting the text is that Abraham is to give up somebody he loves. From the standpoint of inheritance and covenant, Isaac is Abraham's only son, his favorite son, the one he has promoted over his oldest son. Everything has now come down to Isaac.

"What is asked is not only an inexpressibly painful act of sacrifice: it is also an act of *self-sacrifice*. In the *Aqedah* God has in a sense made Abraham revert to the state in which he stood when he began his journey, alone with God, attentive to an unexpected and mysterious divine command, and prepared to leave home even for a destination that is as yet unspecified."

In biblical tradition there is abundant testimony to the idea that the first-born male belongs to God. Also, the burnt-offering or gift offering is central to sacrificial practice. So, what is asked of Abraham is seen as the paradigmatic example of belief and trust in God—an example and story of ultimate faith, not one about ethics. Abraham doesn't know the outcome—or does he? Does he know through faith, knowing as an act of trust, what the outcome will be? Does he have faith in his righteous God, and in his relationship with Him?

God learns that Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son. Does God need to "learn"? Apparently, the biblical God can and does. Abraham so loves God that he willingly follows all that God commands. When tested he demonstrates his fear/love of God. I use these words because we often use them in the same context. My guess is that if any of us think about our relationship to God, we certainly don't fear him. What can God do to us? Does God really work us all over individually? Do we love God, and if so, what does this mean?

> God's amazing promise to Abraham and the Jewish people came as a kind of bolt out of the blue: there was nothing to merit it. The term of this situation in which undeserving people benefit is Grace. Abraham was graced. But whereas before, God's blessings were arbitrary, after the *Aqedah*, they are now earned. Abraham, and his offspring—us, the Jewish people have now gained their covenant through this act.

What are the ramifications of these two stories, for us, at this time?

The almost-sacrifice of Isaac becomes the paradigm of sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem, which for a couple of thousand years, was the form of approach to God, along with music, of course. When the Temple was destroyed, and prayer took over as the means of accessing the Divine, prayer

"*represents* and *reactivates sacrifice*, and then stands in for, or *reanimates*, the *Aqedah*, and thus the legacy of us as the chosen people."

In the *Aqedah* and the story of Passover, the ram that Abraham offers becomes the first paschal lamb. And so the stories of Abraham's departure from his home and people, his descent to Egypt, the Aqedah, and slavery in Egypt are all intimately connected. Is the binding of Isaac a foretaste of the binding of the Jewish people into slavery? Did faith in God's faithfulness, triumph in both cases?

During the Days of Awe, we stand before God, asking for forgiveness—an at-one-ment. Are we asking God to show us the same Mercy and Grace he showed to Abraham and Isaac, and to our ancestors coming out of Egypt on their way to the place of revelation? Are we asking God to give the same stay of execution, and the liberation of freedom, that he gave to them—to us?

These two stories are not presented as an act to be followed, but as a paradigm of faithfulness to God, as in the following of the mitzvot. These are teachings that demonstrate the relationship of God and the Jewish people, as expressed in the Covenant. God resides over the ethical realm, which is not equal to, nor coterminous, with the human understanding of ethics. God, and our contract with Him, resides in the world of passion, faith, love, mercy, and grace—all states which supersede, or come before, the rational and ethical. They are in fact the qualities which we must acknowledge *first* to make sense of the rational and ethical realms in which we spend most of our existence.

Part Three: Chapter 12

A Review of Lukas Foss's Complete Symphonies

Lukas Foss was one of our most adventuresome composers. He was born in Berlin in 1922 to a Jewish family, which moved to Paris in 1933, and then to America in 1937, to escape the Nazi threat. He was a prodigious piano and compositional talent at a young age. Foss was to become the pianist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra during his early years, a professor at UCLA and Boston University, the conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and the Jerusalem and Milwaukee Symphonies, and an elegant speaker about music.

Like his friend Leonard Bernstein, he made his mark in three areas: piano, composition, and conducting. Though he never rivaled Bernstein in popularity, Foss is the more interesting and accomplished composer. Where Lukas had a smaller stage, Bernstein had a grand one. Their desires to be everything to everyone left something to be desired. Where Bernstein seemed to find salvation in conducting, Foss found salvation in composition. Both men suffered from doing too much, spreading themselves far too thin. Both men were so busy they didn't have sufficient time to sit in undisturbed silence to write the music they might have written. Having said this, they still must have led the musical lives they wished. Money aside, they could have done what Esa-Pekka Salonen has now done: step out of the limelight of conducting (sort of) and retreat to the quiet of the studio, where there is no publicity person, no orchestral manager: only you and the music waiting to be written.

Bernstein and Foss lived through the musical and cultural chaos of the Sixties and Seventies. Foss looked at these new approaches early on and engaged them with excitement and verve. His became not so much a style as a poly-stylistic approach to music. Early on he was a neo-classicist as a result of his work with Copland at Tanglewood (Symphony No.1). Later he explored improvisation with his ensemble at UCLA (*Echoi*) and also tried on dodecaphonism and aleatoricism (*Time Cycle*), collage (*Baroque Variations*), minimalism (in a piece written for my ensemble Musical

Elements, *Embros*) and others. About this extensive musical approach, Foss said: "The more influences, the richer our vocabulary," followed by an expansion to "The more techniques, the richer our vocabulary." Many of Foss's pieces don't completely work, but there is in almost every one a moment of pure genius—and that is a gift.

The symphonies are another matter. They cover over fifty years of his creative life, from 1944 to 1995. These works are big-boned, expansive, serious, and probing. Foss threw his full powers into them, and they cohere exquisitely. Each is in the traditional four movements. Together they form a body of work that places them among the very best American symphonic works of the twentieth century.

The first symphony of 1944, written when Foss was just twenty-two, is a burst of energy. While paying homage to Copland of his Americana period (*ca*. 1935–55), it busts the style wide open in emotional depth and daring. Its packing is tight and rigorous, as each of the four movements clocks in between seven and ten minutes. It is stronger than Bernstein's first and is at least equal to Copland at his best, in the second and third symphonies. This work is so good and approachable that it should be a repertoire standard right up there with *Appalachian Spring*.

The first movement is a little bit coy and a little bit winsome. It opens with a transparent and bright G-major arpeggio, then quickly moves to a state of pondering questioning; these are the two emotional positions of the movement. There are changes of meter from duple to triple, with the triple skipping—and a strong and primal (almost primitive) use of dominant–tonic relationships, the simplest of tonal mechanisms: Foss revels in its usage as if he is showing his almost Mozartian credentials, as if stating, "I too can make a lot out of the most trivial and banal!"

Simple melodies abound in single wind instruments supported by string accompaniment, with the occasional brass fanfare. The orchestration is marked by the alternation of choirs, something one finds in the music of the other American symphonists, including Copland of course, but also Schuman, Harris, and Gould. There is an easy use of jazz syncopation as four-beat patterns are broken up into eight-note groups of three, three, and two. There are sections that are portentous, innocent, gentle, or naive. A quick and not-overly-heavy climax gives way to a resting point on an easy major chord. Foss gauges the ending of each movement in careful regard for its place in the larger structure. The man is astute at a very young age.

The second movement is ostensibly a slow movement. But this is only advisory, as much of the music is more upbeat—the journey starts slowly but builds in momentum and speed. This movement, like the first, features solo winds over strings and open sonorities borrowed from Copland. The music is grounded in the bass, as it is very much built from the bottom up, with traditional tonal implications. There is then music that is march-like with steady eighth notes—then music that is folk-like in its simplicity. A section of a disjointed rhythmic ostinato (quite off-kilter at that) provides a sense of disquiet, unease, until it transitions seamlessly back into the opening lyrical materials. An ending of quickly repeated materials, a double cadence, ends with a major chord with a jazzy flat seven.

The third movement is a scherzo and all that that implies. The music alternates be- tween being high and brash and softer and gentler trio-like music. Like Bernstein and Copland, Foss is exploring and incorporating all aspects of American music, classical and jazz. The music sometimes plateaus as it ponders its next direction, but proceeds effortlessly to a climax. The last and fourth movement is a bit longer than all the others. A rhythm of four sixteenth followed by two eighth notes pervades this music (da-ga-da-ga dut-dut). A climax occurs a little before the halfway mark, which leads to the final climax as the symphony ends in a blaze of victorious glory.

Symphony No. 2, more expansive than the first, with each of its four movements allegedly based on a Bach chorale, demonstrates a mastery of new avant-garde techniques. The Allegretto—a slow dance in three/four time—presents a lovely tune in the strings, interposed with a simple single line of rhythmic vitality. A gorgeous, molasses-slow chorale at the end, with mandolin playing out of key, is almost Ivesian. This music is a love letter to the past.

The third, subtitled *Symphony of Sorrows*, provides a look at sorrow from many vantage points. The "Fugue: Of Strife and Struggle," alternates long held tones—atmospheric, hovering, and portentous—with faster music that moves by fits and starts. The orchestration is distinct and sharp. "Elegy for Anne Frank" puts the piano, Foss's instrument, in support of an aching tune in the strings, creating almost a parlor or salon atmosphere. This intimate music moves in and out of time, memories of Anne, and perhaps of his past self.

"Wasteland" opens with bursts of sixteenth notes separated by silence; then the wasteland enters: quiet low notes, desiccated, in minor second

descents, in a short/long rhythm. The music is an exercise in going nowhere without producing boredom, and succeeds brilliantly. The last movement, "Prayer," is as intimate as music can get. A solo trumpet sounds like an emotive combination of a soldier playing "Taps," a cousin to the figure in Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, and the blowing of a ram's horn to awaken the Dead.

The first movement of Symphony No. 4 begins as a world of atonal hovering alternating with a dramatic motif comprising an upward-moving diatonic scale fragment, a confrontation of different musical worlds. These scale passages turn into a bubbling, insouciant, neo-classical, suave soufflé with occasional gruff interruptions. A tune appears that evokes the spirit of Ravel's *Boléro*. All is charmingly dry, bright, and transparent. The music is humorful, tongue-in-cheek, with quicksilver changes of music and emotional character and surprises all around. The climax puts this all together in a Stravinskian overlay of controlled ostinatos over a drone.

The second movement is Foss at his most daring. It is in dream time and inchoate. All is hazy, in a fog, as a Jew's harp, a sweet tonal tune played by solo violin and celeste, and a harmonica suggest sounds of a prairie of the past. Textures are mostly thin and transparent, and all seems to come from afar, very quietly. This is a grand reverie, music with a past and present, but no future.

The third movement, a scherzo, is tonal, perky, and bubbly. The orchestration is bright. The work is a rondo of sorts with delicately scored episodes. There are also moments of off-kilter rhythms, which throw a wrench into the workings. Phrases often end abruptly, as does the conclusion, which is oxymoronic—an odd, gentle Bronx cheer.

The fourth movement is a dreamy take on the opening material of the first movement. Even though this is fifty years later, this cyclic aspect of treatment of the material is just like that of the first symphony. This soft, gentle music is interrupted by loud and curious brass interruptions. This is occasionally off- set with long, quiet, quizzical string chords. The drama of this movement is played out in the conversation between these materials. Much of this is very jazzy, as the orchestra eventually plays a burst of syncopated sharp attacks, in which the piano and vibraphone are featured, along with the brass. A low, dramatic string line appears that sets these bursts in relief, and then high strings appear, which lead to open Copland-like sonorities. Eventually a brass fanfare appears stressing perfect fourths and tri-tones, and at the finish one hears high, long tones in the violins, and

then a sudden and abrupt ending. One wonders if Foss isn't dreaming of times long past, with Bernstein, Copland, and Koussevitsky at Tanglewood, and so coming full circle in his musical and life journey.

These symphonies appear on the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (bmop) label, performed by that orchestra and their conductor Gil Rose. The sound is clear and beguilingly transparent even at its thickest and loudest. Heartrending moments are just that, and, when brashness and bombast is called for, it is of a scorched-earth, no holds-barred, variety. Matthew Guerrieri, who studied with Foss, provides extensive and loving notes. Lukas, of blessed memory, should have a big, happy grin on his face—as he usually did, by the way. You will too after listening to this extraordinary legacy, which is revelatory.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 13

A REVIEW OF ROBERT BEASER'S *GUITAR CONCERTO & OTHER WORKS*

This disc takes the title of its biggest and most prominent work, but it also includes three others: "Evening Prayer," "Ground 0," and "Notes on a Southern Sky." Those first three are all for orchestra, written in the last ten years, while the last is an early piece that Robert Beaser wrote for Eliot Fisk, a guitarist. Whether short or long, these are all substantial works, which is to say that they eschew superficiality. Beaser has always written works that have real ideas, real content, and thus are imbued with real meaning. He is the real deal.

The partnership of Beaser and Fisk goes back to their undergraduate days at Yale University in the early 1970s. Both of them were and are seekers: Beaser in finding a deep and rich music, and Fisk in extending the virtuosic and expressive possibilities of his instrument. Besides the commission for "Notes," Fisk and the elegant flutist Paula Robison commissioned Beaser's "Mountain Songs," a frequently performed and rearranged work that is now firmly placed in the repertoire.

Beaser grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, where he studied percussion, piano, and composition. He performed and wrote for the Boston Youth Symphony, one of the foremost ensembles of its type in the country. He studied with Yehudi Wyner and Jacob Druckman, among others, at Yale College and the Yale School of Music. Thereafter he spent a year in Rome as the winner of the Rome Prize. The work from his Yale days was weighty and complex, but always strong in ideas and logical development. It is a rigorous music with a whiff of the academy. Works in this period include his *String Quartet* and woodwind quintet *Shadow and Light*. As far as I know, these works are not available on recording, but they should be—not just because they represent an important stage in Beaser's youthful development, but because they are excellent pieces. His time in Rome was important, as it is there that he altered his compositional approach and developed a more inclusive and tonal language. Beaser, along with David Del Tredici and others, took up what became the "New Tonality."

I will make the following categorical statements about Beaser's music—there is nary an unnecessary note, and its sense of the inevitable is overpowering. His penchant for development and variation is always present. Large scale architecture and a sense of pacing is unfailingly well done; the forward ride, while always clear, allows for and encourages surprises. But I leave the best for last—Beaser's pieces always *sing*. His music, like all the very best, combines body and soul. His rhythm partakes of the vernacular (like Bernstein or Copland), but Beaser raises its potential and possibilities, like Haydn and Mozart did with the minuet or Bach with the gigue. His materials are always strong and memorable, and he is one of the best orchestrators we have.

The works on the disc *Guitar Concerto* display all of these qualities. These pieces glisten and reward numerous hearings. Fisk describes the "Guitar Concerto" as "epic." I agree. It is a huge work, probably one of the longest and most complicated in the literature. But it doesn't feel this way, which is the sign of a truly fine work. Like most classical concertos, it is cast in three movements. The first is in a quasi-sonata form and is based on a most simple and elegant idea, a chain of thirds.

The developmental process is clearly narrative, which is to say the ongoing sense of movement seems inevitable. Its contours are easily trackable. The guitar takes the lead from the start and the orchestra is a willing and able partner in this almost–*pas de deux*. The second movement is more complex than the first. By this I mean it presents a greater degree of emotional complexity. Called "Tombeau," it employs or refers to various Baroque dances, if in an off-kilter way. It then enters a world that is "nightmarish." Beaser's music is firmly within and stands on the tradition, and he notes that this movement pays homage to Ravel and Couperin. The third, "Phrygian Pick," harkens back to Beaser's "Mountain Songs" in its reference of folk music, but in this case the movement abuts bluegrass and Andulusian musics. It is a wild and raucous romp that brings the entire work to a glorious, albeit intense, conclusion.

Evening Prayer is based on *Esti Dal* (Evening Song) from Kodály's Vegyeskarok (Choruses for Mixed Voices) and was commissioned by the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra. "Based on" in this case means that Beaser utilizes the tune as a jumping off point, a means of departure. The language is reminiscent of middle period Copland, open and clear. It combines youthful exuberance as well as languid and sonorous melodies, or choral-like materials. The music occasionally struts and shows off fine

orchestrational chops. This piece swings big time, like a jazz band on steroids.

Ground 0 was written in memoriam around the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Based on an earlier work for piccolo and piano, it is for the most part fittingly restrained and sonorous. It combines choral-like material (a frequent element in Beaser's work) with a "tintinnabulation" of thin bell-like sounds. Its climax is weighty and profound. It opens and closes in wisps of high sounds, and a quiet stasis. It fulfils its intent perfectly.

Through his partnership with Eliot Fisk, Beaser has made a major and lasting contribution to the solo guitar repertoire with numerous pieces including "Notes on a Southern Sky." Placed after the "Concerto," it might be considered a lengthy encore. The work was one of Beaser's first to look at folk music, in this case, that of Venezuela. It combines soulfulness and impetuosity in its meditations. Long moments of agitated stasis are interrupted by angular abrupt attacks. It is in two sections—slow and fast—but while the first is strongly melodic, there is frequently an undercurrent of tension provided by rapidly repeated notes. The second movement dances in almost-steadying sixteenth note motion, yet it has a clear sense of phrasing that breathes. The driving coda brings this seminal work to a satisfying conclusion. Fisk, as in the concerto, plays brilliantly. His sound is strong yet sensuous. He knows Beaser and this music, and plays both works with dedicated aplomb. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra under the direction of conductor José Serebrier play their hearts out, with a sound that is full and rich, yet also transparent. They hit American syncopations like they own them.

Part Three: Chapter 14

The Scalia Sermon: A Review of Antonin Scalia's *Scalia Speaks*

I come from a long line of lawyers—my father, mother, and uncle. Of my generation both my sister and brother-in-law are lawyers, and now—my son and his wife are lawyers. My mom did not practice so much as she was raising us kids, so my father kind of set the tone. He loved the law and talking about the law. Benjamin Samuel Asia was a bit of a genius (he went off to college at age 14), and an overwhelmingly generous and kind man. He thought of all people as being capable of good, and helped everyone where and when he could. He grew up in the Jewish community of Seattle, and while there might have been latent or overt antisemitism, I do not think it ever bothered him much. He just went along with his life, living it to the fullest, practicing in a small Jewish law firm in Seattle, and raising a family as best he could. He always seemed to have an amused smile on his face. His children and friends were devoted to him and his goodness.

It would seem that Justice Antonin Scalia had a similar youth, life, and persona. At least this is the sense one gets upon reading a book of his speeches, *Scalia Speaks*. The book is edited by his son Christopher, a literature professor, and his former legal clerk Ed Whelan, now director of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. It is filled with speeches and writings, all of it of a blessedly non-legal type. It is approachable and often contains a high degree of wit, an attribute cultivated, I suspect, as a youth but that he mastered with the help of his wife, with whom he had nine (count 'em!) children. So you might have gathered by now that either Scalia was a practicing Hassid or a Catholic, but that name is a dead give away that he was of the latter persuasion.

Scalia said that writing was "really hard," so he spent a lot of time at it, and he was a clarity and grammar freak. Many speeches were given with just "The Outline," which was a page containing a few ideas or phrases and even contained misspellings. But eventually he honed his ideas until they

were razor sharp, a trait he was also known for in his legal writings. The results as found in this book are substantial and fun to read, if occasionally repetitive.

You might now be asking what a review of this book is doing in *Academic Questions*, which while devoted to academic issues, is definitely not skewed to the legal. The answer is a simple one: Scalia, during the course of his long and eventful life, lived a good and meaningful one. He thought and wrote about many areas of concern to those in the academy. He also gave many commencement speeches, less dumb and platitudinous than most, in which he touched upon such subjects as the glory of living in America, the Founding by those great Fathers, the law writ large, education, religion in the public square and the private heart, and how to live a meaningful life.

The foreword is written by his legal antagonist but great friend, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who comments on his perspicacity, acumen, and high spirits. Their relationship is worthy of our attention in this time of utter polarization and an inability to find common ground. Both realize that the law has minority and majority opinions for a reason (that most basic Talmudic, Jewish, and American value), and that it is the debate and discussion which is so crucial.

Scalia loved research and was a bit of a ham. During his student years he performed theatre on the stage. And close to my heart, he adored opera, which is also to point out that he had outside interests, not to mention a strong marriage. The lectures and speeches in the book are placed in various categories. I will address only a few categories and selected speeches, those that give a good flavor of the writer and his intent. These include "On the American People and Ethnicity," "On Faith," "On Law," "On Virtue and the Public Good," and finally, "On Heroes and Friends." Let's start with a Scalian quote: "What makes an American . . . is not the name or the blood or even the place of birth, but the belief in the principles of freedom and equality this country stands for." This is such a simple statement, but in it inheres the completely revolutionary nature of this country. Oft commented on, it still brings chills to those who read it and know its truth. It is at the center of the idea of meritocracy in the academy, an idea based on aptitude mixed with a very large dose of hard work.

At the same time, Scalia celebrated group differences and worshipped the country that allowed these groups to work together for the common good. While he knew there was discrimination, when and where it prevailed

he combated it. He loved his Italian heritage, finding in its legacy four great strengths: a capacity for hard work, a love of family, a love of church, and "a confident knowledge of one's place in God's scheme of things—a love of the simple physical pleasures of human existence: good music, good food and good—or even pretty good—wine."

One of his best friends was a Jew, Nathan Lewin, who said that Scalia loved the Jewish tradition. He took a keen interest in Jewish learning, the Talmud, and other Jewish sources. In a talk for the B'nai B'rith, a Jewish service organization, he quotes George Washington's letter to the first Jewish American community of Newport, Rhode Island. In it Washington writes "For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support." And then, as if to presage Scalia's own use of biblical materials and references in his own opinions, Washington says, "May the children of the stock of Israel . . . continue to merit and enjoy the goodwill of the other inhabitants, while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid." The latter part of this I sang as a youngster on the way to summer day camp. I am sure that Scalia knew, if most of my Jewish brethren did not and still do not, that the quote comes from the biblical book of Micah. In quoting Washington at considerable length, Scalia is demonstrating the great wisdom of the Founders, that they are to be taken seriously, that he is less important than they, thus epitomizing his "originalist" judicial stance.

The editors have chosen a quote to undergird each chapter. With "On Living and Learning" they present "It is a belief that seems particularly to beset modern society that believing deeply in something, and following that belief, is the most important thing a person can do . . . I am here to tell you that it is much less important how committed you are than what you are committed to." One imagines this directed at, oh shall we say, the Nazi or Communist fellow traveler, committed multiculturalist, or perhaps the flagrant deconstructionist for whom no Truth can ever exist; he who thinks all species have the same rights; or, on the campus, those who think any subject, such as the likes of hip hop and cinema, are equally deserving of a student's time and expenditure of his, or more typically, our funds. Bad ideas and actions that result from them can cause havoc and death.

From this section I shall choose three chapters to which I will refer, "The Arts"—a talk given at the Juilliard School; "Civic Education," given

at the Union League Club of Chicago; and perhaps one of most interest to readers of this journal, "College Education," given as a commencement speech at Catholic University.

What is a lawyer doing talking about the arts? Well, he doesn't really talk about them, but rather argues that the law provides the framework for the arts to exist, or at least in a fruitful way for the artist. Shostakovich was treated like a lackey in the Soviet Union, almost always under the threat of death. There were laws in the old Soviet Union and a constitution—it's just that they weren't observed. So while Shostakovich was one of the greatest of all composers of the twentieth century, he didn't live a particularly pleasant existence. The United States, as Scalia explains, while not assuring artistic genius, allows the artist to pursue his goals and to experience material gain from his endeavors. The artist living in America has an open and unfettered access to the marketplace without political constraints or the threat of death. Intellectual property is protected as is the artist's real property, contracts protect his rights with those who employ him, and of course, the artist can pretty much create that which he wants without the threat of imprisonment.

What is civic education and why is it important? One definition might include a portrayal and subsequent understanding of the nature of America and its government, perhaps undergirded by at least some knowledge of its history. In the early days, Scalia notes that this implied nothing short of an indoctrination in republican principles, which also suggested a rejection of those European principles from which our Founders separated us. While it might be fun to watch a prince get married, it is important for Americans to remember that we allow no suggestion of inherited grace in our own democracy. While Sweden maintains a state church—although very few Swedes may nowadays enter those sacred spaces—we Americans do not allow any church to be privileged over another, while nonetheless maintaining the notion, as Scalia does, that "belief in God is very conducive to a successful republic." He suggests that students should know of and about the constitution, not to mention its Talmudic analogue, The federalist papers. The enterprise is not only about how to engage in civil discourse, but it also requires a common base of knowledge about the American enterprise. That this leads to the reading of certain (great) books by all should then come as no surprise, nor that he finds particular elements of current academia a disgrace. He adds in other speeches the positive traits and virtues of courage, tradition, and character that provide the ballast for any understanding of who we are as Americans.

In discussing "College Education" Scalia begins with what it has not been (he hopes). It has not made anyone an expert in anything. But this is the good news. Because if the student knows this, he knows just how much he does not know. And this sense of humility in the face of the extent of human knowledge is important. The student has not learned many skills, but he has learned that the acquiring of those skills is a needed and lengthy process. However, he has acquired some valuable intellectual "muscles" to use throughout life. He has learned how to think and learned how to learn and that "skill will never go stale, and it is marketable anywhere." He will also realize that he is part of the West, and a particular part, the United States. This might be a contentious issue for those of us in universities teaching many students from China, Korea, or the Middle East. But we better face it and recognize that our institutions, while trying to promulgate globalism, are Western to the core, as no other civilization looks outward to the extent that we do. Finally, Scalia notes that education can be used for good or evil, and that all educational institutions previously took some form of moral formation as their underlying mission, which is now a forbidden topic. As Scalia states, "For to have strong views of right and wrong is to be discriminating, which is the only sin left on campus: just as toleration is the only universally acknowledged virtue."

Much of the rest of the book resides in the groves of legal matters, looking at subjects as diverse as the vocation of a judge, interpreting the constitution, freedom of speech, legislative history, and other areas perhaps of greater interest to those interested in law, politics, and the machinations of the Court, than to those in academia. I found it all of interest, as the topics have currency, and the writing is so clear and succinct. And then again, I do have law in my DNA.

PART THREE: CHAPTER 15

SOUL MUSIC: A REVIEW OF JAN SWAFFORD'S *LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT*

Jan Swafford is a composer, educator, and writer. His previous books include biographies of Ives, Brahms, and Beethoven, as well as *The Vintage Guide to Classical Music* (1992). They are all well worthy of your attention.

His most recent book is *Language of the Spirit: An Introduction to Classical Music*. Notice the ordering of those two statements. For Swafford, music is about the spirit, that aspect of ourselves that is unquantifiable, mysterious, and ineffable. It expresses who we are as sentient creatures endowed with consciousness and the ability to recognize beauty; the mystery of the universe and of our very nature is captured best in music. That is, the *classical music* of the West, about which he says:

> Ours is the broadest, most kaleidoscopic musical tradition, with over a millennium of constant exploration and renewal. One of the great virtues of Western music is not only its enormous technical journey from monody to polyphony to homophony, from evolving tonality to evolving atonality, triads to tone clusters, simplicity to complexity, a small palette of colors to an enormous palette, austere to impassioned, calculated to crazed. It has also shown an ability to absorb into itself ideas and voices from around the world, and from popular music and jazz, while still remaining itself.

The book is straightforward, jargon-free, and there is never a moment of triviality or dullness. Swafford has a knack for getting to the core of everything, burrowing into the essence of the matter at hand. After years of working at his craft, his writing is almost disarmingly engaging. It is as if you are having a friendly conversation over coffee, and when you are done, you realize just how much more than that it has been.

The book of course talks about some of the most important works by the most important composers, geniuses who have fortunately walked the earth and left us their stunning creations. These include the likes of

Monteverdi, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Berlioz and Schumann, Chopin, Wagner and Brahms, Dvořák and Mahler, to name a good sampling. When we get to the twentieth century, there is no question that Swafford's choices are sound, as all of the composers have safely entered the repertoire. Thus, he includes Debussy, Strauss, Ravel, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Ives. Also making an appearance are Shostakovich, Britten, and Copland. Under the chapter heading of Further Modernist Listening, other composers, who are perhaps just a bit more minor in stature, are presented in thumbnail sketches which provide the essential, as well as witty and topical, information. These sketches are shorter or longer, depending on Swafford's estimation of the composer's importance or their topicality. Thus, while Philip Glass is very well known and popular, Swafford is not a big fan and gives him short notice. Steve Reich, author of the seminal minimalist work *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, is given a bit more space. Presentations of the works are pithy and leave you wanting to know more—by listening, of course! In this regard, Swafford provides the occasional suggestion of particular recordings to which one might listen, knowing that next month a new one might appear of even greater moment.

The book is the result of Swafford's engagement with music over the course of a lifetime. He relies in part on the strength of time, saying, "I have a certain respect for common wisdom; it never goes far enough, but often it's common for good reason."

Swafford knows that music is an unforgiving art form and that only a very few composers of any generation or period—which they define—survive the test of time. Thus, I am sure it is with some trepidation that he makes his claim for Ligeti as the major composer of the last half of the twentieth century.

His view is that Ligeti is the master and most important composer of the Western Classical Music Tradition. His chapter follows on the heels of those of Bartók, Shostakovich, Britten, and then Copland, so this is heady company. Why do I say this? Because, at least in part, these four composers created works that have become central to, and are part of, the repertoire. And they wrote in genres where they had to compete with the masters, such as the string quartet or the symphony. Can the case be made similarly for Ligeti? I am skeptical.

Ligeti's early Bartók-inspired music is journeyman's work. Fair enough, as this is true of most composers' early music. It is representative of trying to find one's way through the styles of one's immediate models.

When Ligeti got to the West, escaping from his homeland of Transylvania/Hungary in 1956, his encounter with the avant-garde produced what is called sound-mass, music that is mostly about musical density, and absent of what were formally the principal contents of Western music: harmony and melody. Of these elements his music is almost absent. His music does employ polyphony, but only to create dense textures in which the polyphony itself cannot be heard. His *Kammerkonzert* is the small gem of this period. The music is quizzical, peculiar, bizarre, and completely spaced-out and tranquil, but never particularly memorable. It is emotionally crimped: expert, even dazzling, but limited in emotional expression. For much of his career, Ligeti felt he was fighting against being in a modernist box and trying to find a relationship to a more open present and to some position vis-à-vis the past. He didn't find such a place in his heart or his music. But Ligeti was a seeker, never satisfied with his past work, and thus determined to push into new terrain and new challenges. I am less certain than Swafford that what he produced will be of more than minor interest in the future.

Whom might Swafford have chosen as the composer whose music might define the last half of the twentieth century? I would most likely call on an American. On my list would be George Rochberg, whose symphonies are a major lodestar and whose string quartets call into question the Modernist enterprise; Stephen Albert, whose mature works are melodically and structurally a wonder; or maybe George Crumb, whose music struck with terrific force as it combined old and new, as well as music of other cultures. Like Ligeti, these composers worked in relation—either closer to or further away from—the Tradition. Their music is less idiosyncratic than Ligeti's, but it is also less icy, more emotively engaging and personally expressive. Their music is connected to a breadth of human feeling that Ligeti's is not.

This book is simple but masterly. The writing is meant to get the reader to become the listener and/or performer, to actually engage with the stuff of music, its sound, and what that sound does to our—ahem—souls. *Language of the Spirit* takes us down the path to a greater understanding of our lives, because music is the art form that best represents our human nature and how we experience life and the world in which it takes place.

Part Three: Chapter 16

Can We All Just Get Along? A Review of Arthur Brooks's *Love Your Enemies*

Arthur Brooks has written many books, most of them with an academic provenance. He was in the employ of Syracuse University for many years as an economist, is most recently the president of the American Enterprise Institute, and will leave that position this summer to join the Harvard Kennedy School as professor of practice of public leadership. Brooks will also serve as a senior fellow at Harvard Business School. Yet Dr. Brooks is also a former professional musician having performed in a major brass quintet and with the City Orchestra of Barcelona. He was a French horn player, which even when played at its best, is a notoriously fickle instrument, and thus he has earned his humble and approachable character honestly.

Brooks is an economic conservative and a devout Catholic, but nonetheless he presents himself as just a little bit impish; he likes to wear very bright socks against his downtown black pants, shirt, and jacket. He is gregarious, counsels soon-to-be- married couples, meditates, and works out a lot. In short, Brooks is an astute academic who can also speak to and write for the average Joe.

His most recent book, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt* (2019), is somewhere between a self-help book—for individuals as well as the country—and a how-to book on being a mensch, the Yiddish word for someone who acts with integrity. This shouldn't be surprising as Brooks grew up Jewish in the then laid-back city of Seattle.

The book's primary concern is our current "culture of contempt," which he describes as something akin to, but far worse than, hate. Hate at least recognizes the humanity of the other who is being hated. Contempt suggests that the individual or group is hardly human, not worthy of attention,

completely dehumanized, beyond the pale. At its worst, contempt leads to the Holocaust, the mass killing of the Tutsis by the Hutus in the Rwandan genocide, or the elimination through mass starvation of the kulaks by Stalin. In conversation, debate, or intense discussion, it makes communication impossible:

> Across the political spectrum, people in positions of power and influence are setting us against one another. They tell us our neighbors who disagree with us politically are ruining our country. That ideological differences aren't a matter of differing opinions but reflect moral turpitude. That our side must utterly vanquish the other, even if it leaves our neighbor without a voice.
>
> In the very moment in which America most needs to come together as a nation—in the early decades of what, for the good of the world, should be a new American century—we are being torn apart, thoughtlessly and needlessly. We are living in a culture of contempt.

Brooks is concerned that mass communication and social media drive the ascendance of contempt, its very anonymity and herd mentality making it more prevalent. Unlike most self-help books, Brooks backs up his arguments with data gathered from social science. We know from the data that anonymity allows for and produces more extreme behavior than when one knows the identity of individual participants in discourse. We know also that people's behavior is worse when part of a crowd. So that which we experience anecdotally, Brooks is careful to detail, is empirically true as well.

Why is contempt a bad way of functioning in the world? Brooks demonstrates that conversations in which one party treats the other with contempt rarely changes that other person's position or state of mind. In fact, Brooks cites studies indicating that most of us are hard wired to be liberal or conservative, and rarely are people's views changed by evidence that might suggest their position is wrong or not effective in achieving their goals. Contempt is also bad for the person who is contemptuous, as it makes them morally corrupt and generally unhappy.

One might say that Brooks is arguing for the Buberian idea of always treating someone with whom you are interacting, no matter how much you disagree, as a Thou and not an It. Therefore, it is his contention that we must first engage with each other's stories and in so doing find that we have more in common than we suspect. There must be an inherent understanding that we—all of us—are seeking the Truth, and none of us possesses it in its

entirety. He takes the approach of open and vibrant discussion and the resultant majority and minority positions, knowing that the status of those positions—as well as one's view of them–can change. The best of motives should be assumed on both sides of an argument.

For example, those who argue for gun control as a moral imperative want children not to be assaulted in their schools. Those who believe in the primacy of the Second Amendment want children to be safe as well, but recognize the value of self-defense as outlined in that amendment. In other words, no one wants dead kids—God forbid!—but in matters relating to guns there are in fact competing values that come to bear on the problem.

Brooks takes special note of the situation in the academy and is concerned with the breakdown of civility on campus generally, and with shutting down unpopular ideas specifically. His argument for niceness and gratitude as qualities that should be sought after perhaps fits best here. Students coddled on campuses with wonderful dorms, superb food, and four years of time to learn, might take this to heart rather than assuming universities are citadels of white male power, bastions of rape culture, and marked by unequal treatment of minorities and women. He mentions that we all need to get out of our usual demographic environment and interact with those who are different from us in background and thought. This is inherently difficult in academic settings where there are so few professors or administrators who are not part of the prevailing intellectual groupthink. He takes great pains to stress that the overriding liberal bias would be just as bad if it were instead an overwhelming conservative bias.

In the chapter "Is Competition our Problem?" Brooks gives the example of sports to help understand and appreciate the importance of competition in economics and politics. A few conclusions from the sports world are:

> Competition b reeds excellence . . . It requires rules .
>
> . . Mutual recognition of the rules and compliance with them is a needed form of cooperation .
>
> . . this results in unifying people through an admiration for athletic excellence, voluntary agreement on the rules, and the shared experience of watching the game.

Competition is also better if there are many strong parties competing; it makes the competitors work harder and perform better. Brooks explains that the same principles can be applied to free enterprise. Competition has

raised living standards and insured that ordinary people can move up the economic ladder. Economic competition foments excellence. All participants have to play by the same rules.

In fact, according to Brooks, we should revel in the competition of ideas, in both the political and academic arenas. And we need them in the political and academic arenas. "We need a passionate competition of ideas so that each side refines its solutions, becomes more innovative, and therefore the best ideas rise to the top. Shutting down the competition of ideas makes it harder to achieve our common moral goods."

Brooks realizes this is nowhere more important than in the academy. He notes that many studies have claimed that race and gender diversity increase creative thinking. But he also notes that true diversity comes in the realm of ideas and that this is sorely lacking. Ideological conformity is simply bad for getting to the truth. "The trend to shut down the competition of ideas on campus is harmful to research and instruction and is harmful to the unity of our country—because too many in the next generation of leaders are learning to despise and ostracize, rather than understand and engage, those with whom they disagree."

There are various people that Brooks presents as exemplars of how to behave without contempt while not requiring anyone to give up his strong intellectual positions. These include the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, and the relationship between Robert George, the well-known conservative political philosopher, and the left-wing Cornel West, both of whom are professors at Princeton University and who regard each other as "brothers." I find the first two examples compelling and the last problematic. Cornel West is not an exemplar of civility, having lashed out at Harvard University President Lawrence Summers while a faculty member there as the "Ariel Sharon of higher education" and working closely with racial provocateurs Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton (West ran Sharpton's 2004 presidential campaign). As Thomas Friedman has written, "Criticizing Israel is not anti-Semitic . . . But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest." Dr. West, who lobbied the University of Arizona to divest from companies doing business with Israel, regularly does just that, and I find the George/West relationship troubling, though Brooks obviously does not.

Brooks concludes by giving the terms of engagement for lessening conflict in the culture war, mainly by seeing it as a competition of ideas in

which we all succeed rather than aim for mutual destruction. Those terms include not listening to a person unless he is "teaching you something or expanding your worldview and moral outlook." "Escape the bubble. Go where you're not invited, and say things people don't expect." One of my favorites is "no eye-rolling" (I am a grimacer).

The competition of ideas should also be known as "disagreement." Maybe spend more time reading novels or listening to music than reading newspapers, watching cable news, or reading policy statements. And maybe for us in academia, just keep smiling and don't let the jerks get you down. "Remember: You are now entering mission territory."

PART THREE: CHAPTER 17

A TALE OF TWO CONCERTOS: THE PIANO CONCERTOS OF YEHUDI WYNER AND BERNARD RANDS

My friend Stephen Albert once said that he couldn't imagine writing a string quartet after those of Bartok. I countered with what still seems to me an appropriate response: how can you write a symphony after Beethoven, songs after Schubert, or really, operas after Mozart or, oops—maybe even Wagner? So with this in mind, I am taking a short break from writing about individual composers to present comments in regards to various genres including the string quartet, opera, songs and concertos, for cello, violin and piano. I do this because particular pieces have been added to the repertoires of these genres which are exquisite and they should be better known, appreciated, and performed.

I begin with the piano concerto because two have come to my attention that are quite marvelous. One is the Piano Concerto by Yehudi Wyner which I heard awhile back but is now available in a newly released recording (Bridge 9282). The other is a newly premiered work penned by Bernard Rands. The fine soloists are Robert Levin and Jonathan Bliss respectively and the concertos were commissioned by the Boston Symphony which admirably continues the legacy of Koussevitsky's commitment to American music.

Wyner and Rands have much in common. They are both in their 80s and are notes and rhythm composers, which is to say the pitches and durations really count. Thus they are traditionalists and believe in an ongoing dialogue with that tradition. They are Pulitzer Prize winners, Wyner for this work and Rands for the orchestra song cycle *Canti del Sole,* and were eminent teachers.

Wyner grew up the son of the gifted Yiddish art song composer, Lazar Wyner; studied with Hindemith at Yale; and spent important years at the Academy in Rome. Wyner is also a fluent and refined pianist. His

compositional output runs the gamut including an abundance of chamber music and a healthy representation of song and/or song cycles (partly influenced by his gifted wife, former singer turned conductor, Susan Davenny Wyner), as well as works reflective of ,and on, the Jewish tradition. His music is always artful and probing.

His piano concerto is an expression of the normative aspects of the tradition while also demonstrating his interest in folding in the vernacular which is done frequently in his music. (e.g. *Passage 1*—New World, NWCR701). This music proceeds in a ruminative and associative manner that is quirky and quixotic. There is an ambivalence or hesitation, a holding back or a withholding of clarity, an insouciance and double-edged humor. These traits give the music charm and delight, zest and sparkle and display a sonic twinkle in the eye.

Rands was born in Sheffield England, studied in Wales and then received perhaps his greatest influence from studies with Luciano Berio. Escaping the British madness of proclaiming the kingship of composers at an early age—and either you are or you aren't—he came to the States early in his career from York University in the north of England to the much sunnier climes at UC/San Diego.

His early music was decidedly effected by his Italian experience, with its interest in the short gesture, the theatrical, a playful usage and deconstruction of texts, spatial notation and the use of new symbols (e.g. *Mésalliance* and *Ballad I*). But like his mentor and other avant-gardists Rands soon realized that he wanted more control. His music became simpler and more direct, as he jettisoned the paraphernalia of the avant-garde to write clear and straight-forward music that is driven by color and a latent lyricism. There isn't a hint of the vernacular in his music—rather this is music that proclaims its seriousness and high art value. It is more proscribed and hermetic. Thus, Wyner is to Mozart as Rands is to Debussy.

Both concerti are about twenty minutes in duration. Wyner's is in one long movement with varying speeds and moods, while Rands's is in the usual three-movement structure of fast-slow-fast. In both the piano and orchestra engage in quick conversation, bravura passages, and the orchestra occasionally performs typical accompanimental duties. Cadenzas are short in both. Wyner tends to employ more traditional pianistic attributes like rapid-fire octaves and longish digital displays of very fast passage work, not surprising given his own virtuoso technique and feel for the keyboard. It isn't for nothing that the title of his work is *Chiavi in Mano*, an in-joke for

Italians that means "keys in hand." Rands' piano writing is episodic with bursts of energy and recovery; about an alteration of quick scurrying single lines interrupted or articulated by chordal interruptions.

Both composers write in an extended tonal realm. In Wyner's world this allows for an allusion to honky-tonk in the middle which is then realized in a brazen way at the conclusion; it is a bit cheesy but damn if it doesn't work! The tonal materials are occasionally clouded by vast tertial extensions and quasi-octotonic fragments rich in minor seconds and tritones, but there is always a return to the bright tertial landscape—in fact, this is one of Wyner's sunniest works, perhaps a result of its Italian provenance. The sixths and thirds are presented with rhythmic cells that make them indelible. This is music that imprints itself on the memory, a trait that Rochberg suggested maybe isn't such a bad thing after all.

Rands's concerto starts with a lovely lyrical ascent of a minor sixth followed by a descent of a tritone creating a whole tone scale fragment (think Debussy at his most dreamy and hazy). This is followed soon by a perfect fourth which in conjunction with the previous material creates a wide range of intervallic possibilities, all of which Rands exploits handsomely. Repetition allows this initial idea to stick in the mind and it even comes back in the final movement to provide a sense of return and closure. The middle movement is Rand's at his most restrained, elegant and ethereal. This adagio features unadorned two-part counterpoint that starts in the lowest register in the bass and cello and traces a slow ascent into the highest realms in the violins, and after a very slight variant in the piano, the music continues in this tranquil manner throughout. The last movement is like a riff on Berio's *Points on the Curve to Find* in its single-minded pursuit of the heterophonic possibilities of trills and a single scurrying line that connects them.

Wyner's music is always searching and probing, moving towards a climax or a point of revelation, and then pulling back, not quite succeeding, then moving on in its quest. It is discursive, finding and giving pleasure in its search. It often employs repeated rhythmic units, almost Hindemithian ones, and transparent doublings that are sharp and precise. When he wants, Wyner can also create the most luminous of mist, as materials within veiled clouds evanesce and proceed refreshed. Having said this, the finely etched pitch and rhythmic materials hold primary interest and their coloring, while always just right, is of secondary importance.

Rands' orchestration is more detailed and perfumed. The music is chock full of bell-like sonorities that help articulate the working out of phrases as well as larger scale structure. Orchestration is here more than half of the game. In some past works this has sometimes resulted in a less than clear articulation of the harmonic rate, but in this piece the harmonic flow is unerringly direct and transparent.

We live in a world that rewards the new, the youthful and frequently the trendy, inarticulate, vapid and superficial. How nice it is to recognize in these works the obvious truism that if a real artist remains true to himself and follows the quest of deepening his artistic expression, his voice gets better, deeper, and richer with age. As Wilfrid Sheed said about the older artist: "If he whores after the new thing, he will only get it wrong and wind up praising the latest charlatans, the floozies of the New. His business is keeping his own tradition alive and extending it into its own future." And it is just so in these two concertos by Wyner and Rands, as we find these seasoned masters writing at full and magnificent strength.

Part Three: Chapter 18

Music in the Southwest Part I: Tito Muñoz and the Phoenix Symphony

The summer is over and it is time to get back to making contact with the world again. And I am right in time as it is the start of the new concert season.

In my brief absence the music world continues to go quite gaga with youth. Many major orchestras are now under the control and directorship of the new generation.

The hope seems to be that these relative youngsters will bring a vitality to the classical music scene that hasn't been present in the recent past. It certainly worked in the past with Lenny becoming the new darling upon his debut as the result of the illness of Bruno Walter, and in our time there is the Dudamel effect producing its charms in LA-he who was proclaimed a conducting "stud" by its former youthful director Salonen, who is no conducting slouch himself. There are the new youthful directors in Philadelphia with Nézet-Séguin, Seattle with Morlot, and the newest in Boston with Nelsons. Gilbert, who directs the New York Philharmonic, must be feeling like an old-timer.

But this is all to let you know that there is another newbie that you may not have heard about down in my neck of the woods, and that would be Tito Muñoz, who is beginning his first season in a few days with the Phoenix Symphony.

Tito, New York born and bred, comes to the Southwest to start his first state-side directorial position. His street creds are strong. He currently serves as Music Director of the Opéra National de Lorraine and the Orchestre symphonique et lyrique de Nancy, and his previous appointments have included a three-year tenure as Assistant Conductor of The Cleveland Orchestra and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Hopefully his work with these latter two orchestras, among the best in the world, has given him a good sense of just how good an orchestra can be. He is smart, precocious, full of energy, well-spoken, and ready to hit the road running. While

programming for his first season is pretty safe (I am sure much of its creation by necessity predated his appointment, and thus was done without his input), there are some nice inclusions of newer music, including Morton Gould's Spirituals, an infrequently played piece, and a relatively new saxophone concerto by Jennifer Higdon.

I know the orchestra pretty well having been its composer-in-residence in the early nineties, when the orchestra was then under the direction of the youthful James Sedares. At that time, and since then and into the present, the orchestra has gone through the usual struggles of a relatively new orchestra in a youthful and burgeoning area of the country, where golf is given more credence than high-class music. The orchestra is a good one, with a strong sense of the lyrical line and a historically full and rich string sound. Under Sedares the orchestra produced many fine recordings for the Koch label, bettering its attention to rhythmic clarity, and bringing national and international plaudits, all well deserved. It should also be noted that together we programmed a slew of new music in the regular concert series, played real new music in educational concerts, and created a new music series. And take note orchestra managers, artistic directors, music directors, board members, and especially marketers—Ticket sales went up. I repeat—TICKET SALES WENT UP!!

As I wish Tito well in his first season, and hope that he and the Phoenix Symphony thrive, I hope that he will take as his example for the future the orchestras of the West Coast. For at least two decades, Seattle under the leadership of Gerard Schwartz, San Francisco with Michael Tilson Thomas, and Los Angeles under Essa-Pekka Salonen and now Dudamel, have championed and integrated the music of our time, and particularly that by Americans, into their programming. The orchestras play it great and audiences dig it. Phoenix has done its share but now should become a true Western American orchestra that champions the music of composers of this land and time. Most acting companies wouldn't be caught dead with more than half of their offerings being by dead guys. Why should orchestras be any different. Go to it Tito!

PART THREE: CHAPTER 19

MUSIC IN THE SOUTHWEST PART II: THE TUCSON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

There have been occasions when the American basketball Dream Team has been beaten by a team from a little itty-bitty country because that latter team plays real team ball, and the most famous guys just can't make it happen together. Sometimes this happens in the music world as well. And when it does it is pretty amazing. Now to be sure, music is not a competitive art, all those silly competitions notwithstanding. It is supposed to be, or at least aims at, transcendence.

Something amazing happened in Tucson over the last weekend, when the Tucson Symphony Orchestra played an all-American program of music by Bernstein, Gershwin, and Copland to open its new season. Sorry for mixing my metaphors, but the orchestra, and its music director and conductor George Hanson and soloist Alaine Lefevre, hit the ball out of the park—no they hit three balls out of the park to be exact.

This young and medium-budget orchestra played with a palpable verve and excitement. Hanson, who is in his twentieth and final season with the orchestra, is a seasoned maestro who is moving from strength to strength. Together they caught the spirit of the music exactly right, and executed it all with exactitude and finesse. Okay, a few more strings wouldn't have hurt to get that Philadelphia sound. But this was a band of brothers and sisters playing its heart out, and for this concert they were a top ten orchestra.

The program began with Bernstein's *On the Town: Three Dance Episodes*. While I don't think most of Lenny's music is persuasive, he is best in lighter works like this and West Side Story. Perhaps like Beethoven, he found his voice in a genre where few other composers had already made their mark. This piece is vital, rhythmic, jazzy, and bluesy, if not stamped with individuality. The orchestra and Hanson made its every moment an event, sounding as tight as a Kenton or Dorsey big band. Rhythm was a-swinging, just right for the style, and as tight and precise as Janet Jackson's malfunctioning costume. In a word, they "cooked."

Pianist Alain Lefevre came on next for a performance of the *Gershwin Concerto In F*. A showman's showman—think a small Liberace—this guy left it all on the floor. He and the orchestra, under Hanson's gentle and watchful eye, played it like chamber music. Lefevre sang the lyrical lines, played the rhythms in style, and all of it came with attention to details and a wide breadth of dynamics-whispers and shouts. The sound was rich and never brittle. The principal trumpet played his part in this and the Bernstein like Armstrong might have, which is to say with brilliance and flamboyance.

Copland's *Symphony No. 3* is one of the masterpieces of the American musical canon. It is big and bold, effervescent and glistening. Lenny thought it had major problems and Copland didn't—Copland was right. This is a work that is American through and through, perhaps most in its searching quality. It displays all of Copland's middle period language at its best, including gorgeous and glistening orchestral combinations, like piano, xylophone, high strings and harps, and memorable material that beguiles as it returns in various guises. The massive brass music that became the Fanfare for the Common Man is a section of import and weight, whose message is even deeper because of the soft and quirky treatment it is given earlier by the woodwinds. But what is most important is the journey of the work, from questions to answers, from woeful dread to a secular joyousness that is truly American, to the calm of thankfulness. Hanson made this journey matter by getting the structure just right. I have not heard a better reading or performance,

A couple of final notes.

All of these composers are Jewish. Is this a coincidence? I don't think so. It is perhaps not surprising that those on the outside were trying very hard to define what it means to be an American and to forge this in their music. And they were very thankful to be in a country who welcomed them and their contributions.

The audience loved this program—and I mean *loved* it. Ovations were lusty, loud, and long. The lesson here is that American orchestras should be performing a lot more American music; that this music has an immediacy for American audiences; and that American audiences respond to it with a visceral quality, the same way that Hungarians respond to Bartok and Kodaly. The Tucson Symphony should take this to heart. In the meantime, these musicians should put more resin on the bat and keep swinging for the fences!

Part Three: Chapter 20

Music in the Southwest Part III: Two Concerts in Tucson

Just under two weeks ago two remarkable concerts took place in Tucson, my hometown.

It is hard to make a violin sound great in the city's Music Hall. Only really fine ones can project. So my ears perked up when Angelo Xiang Yu began to play Prokoviev's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the Tucson Symphony under the direction of guest conductor David Lockington. Yu's sound, rich and full, flowed effortlessly. Even his softest utterances had impact. It could be his fiddle, but I suspect it also must be his soul. There wasn't a note out of tune or a misjudged bow stroke. Every phrase had life and a reason for being in the ongoing musical discourse. I haven't heard such a perfect performance from one so young in a very long time. Called back for encores, he performed some Paganini and then Massanet's *Thais*. With the first, he captured his audience with acute virtuosity, and then with the second brought them nearly to tears with his soulful, introspective singing. This is a new cat on the block to be seriously watched, or better, heard.

I then walked over the to the neighboring theatre where the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music were giving the final concert of its annual winter chamber music festival. The festival, headed by former cellist Peter Rejto, has been going on for twenty-four years and is uniformly stellar. This year was no exception. Performers come from here and abroad, and include the seasoned and the young. I mention them here by name because they were among the strongest I have heard, both in individual level of accomplishment and in their preternatural ensemble unity. It helps when performances are filled with precision, and wit and joy. The performers included: flutist Carol Wincenc who is always winsome and perky; oboist Nicholas Daniel who played with wit, verve, and a hint of Mozartian naughtiness; clarinetist Charles Neidich, who is as smooth, expressive and virtuosic as it gets; hornist William Pervis who plays with style and grace and never misses a note; and Benjamin Kamins who provided as clean and clear a bass part as

you will find. Pianists Piers Lane and Bernadette Harvey provided rock-solid accompaniment as necessary and their solo bits were always impeccably elegant. The Jupiter String Quartet, a group in residence at the University of Illinois Champagne/Urbana, provided a dose of youthful energy but didn't skimp on soulfulness and lyricism either.

And now the music. Poulenc was represented by his witty *Sextet for Piano and Winds*. I used to think his music too light and superficial to be taken seriously, but now I find it witty, saucy, well-timed, and elegant. A brand new piece came next, by Pierre Jalbert. I have never heard a piece of his I haven't admired and this one was no exception. A *Piano Quartet* in four movements, this one includes a first movement, Mannheim Rocket, which features simple scalar passages always going up; Kyrie, a chant-like movement; a scherzo, that featured wispy glissandi a la Earle Brown's *String Quartet*; and finally a last movement, Pulse, which does just that for its entirety. His music, and this piece, is well-crafted, and full of energy well-placed, and reveals a deeper soul as well. He combines disparate materials in a way that is natural and communicative. The music moves with clarity and purpose, and is never forced. Structures are clear and satisfying, and while the music reveals its glories on first hearing, it is evident there is more to be discovered on further listenings. Neither hip nor trendy, Jalbert is the real thing, a composer who has things to say and says them very, very, well.

The concert ended with Schubert's Octet in F Major. Joined by a bevy of additional players, this piece of almost endless eight bar phrases—but oh, what eight bar phrases!—was played with warmth and a sense of generosity.

Finally, the Festival and the AFCM are to be commended for their rigorous commissioning program. If one counts the commissions for the festival and the regular season, I suspect their number is more than the other top ten chamber music societies combined!

Part Three: Chapter 21

A Review of Jan Swafford's *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*

Jan Swafford, one of our best music biographers, is first and foremost a composer. His compositional output, while not large, is rich in spirit. Listen to his *Piano Quartet* and *Piano Trio* (both available on a single disc) for starters. It is this compositional persona that so informs his biographies. Not only does his empathy for the composer come through, but so does his understanding of the compositional process, its inner workings. Whether in his definitive biography of Ives, his meditation on Brahms or in this most recent offering, Swafford gets to the core of the man and deep inside the music.

His book, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (2014), ten years in the making, is no exception. The book is really two books in one; the life and times of Mr. Beethoven, and gentle analyses of a number of his most seminal pieces. Swafford is masterful in both spheres.

Beethoven's father was a musician, and his son's musical proclivity, as with many prodigies, was displayed very early. His talent as a pianoforte virtuoso developed through his teen years into his early twenties. His general education, that which there was, was influenced by the *Aufklarung*, that late eighteenth century intellectual movement of enlightenment and liberalization. He never did learn to multiply. He was nominally religious—he believed in God—without having a strong attachment to Christian dogma or practice.

He was self-possessed, defiant, manipulative, overbearing, a braggart; yet he could also be charming, felicitous, engaging and witty. While he loved humanity in general, his dealings with people as individuals were difficult from the start and remained so all his life. He fought with everyone—his landlords, teachers (Haydn included), musicians, patrons/aristocrats, bureaucrats, his nephew, his immediate family and relatives. His dealings with women were equally disastrous, with tragedy plaguing him throughout his life. (In this regard, Swafford makes the case

for his choice of the Immortal Beloved, but has a hard time putting too much energy into this enterprise. Only a few musicologists and amorous detectives could really care about this, and Swafford isn't one of them.)

Beethoven's health was always rotten and only got worse throughout his life. He had a bad stomach, perhaps from lead poisoning. He suffered headaches and other maladies dealt with by doctors who usually only made matters worse given the primitive nature of medicine.

There is of course the matter of his deafness. Swafford, as any biographer does, takes this and the Heiligenstadt letter—the contemplation of suicide—as a watershed in the composer's life. How could one not, as this was a turning point for Beethoven. It meant the end of his performing career, a slow retreat from society, polite and otherwise, and a complete commitment to composition. Once he decided to remain alive, his compositions were what gave his life meaning. His deafness didn't slow him down a whit; rather, it seems to have added to his basic nature of defiance.

Once he arrived in Vienna from Bonn, where he grew up, Beethoven made himself known through his stellar playing and improvisation. He eventually put on concerts of his own music to raise money. In these concerts he included both crowd pleasers as well as works that stretched his listeners. He followed this pattern in his compositional process as well, following "more aggressive and challenging works with milder, more attractive, more "pleasing ones."

Throughout his life he moved around frequently. While based in Vienna he was forever changing apartments. He summered in the countryside and vacationed at baths to gain their supposed curative effects. With all this hustle and bustle it is even more remarkable that his compositional efforts were so steadily productive.

Swafford notes that Beethoven had to teach his audience how to listen to his music. Even more so that Mozart or Haydn, the listener had to grasp the radically evolutionary nature of his music, for he was taking the principles of these two composers but always going for more: "volume levels both louder and softer than his models, everything more intense, more poignant, more driven and dramatic, more individual, longer and weightier, with heightened contrasts and greater virtuosity.

There is an attempt to give each piece a higher profile, or individual personality than in the past." His music is like the blues—in gaiety there lurks sadness, and in sadness there lurks a hidden joy. It is perhaps this

mixture of emotion, or its possibility, as well as its unceasing intensity, that makes this music so unique. By the way, he didn't have an immediate success, although it didn't take all that long for the Viennese to realize that he was indeed the rightful successor to Mozart and Haydn. His music became accepted when "the value of pleasing declined and the values of "original, fiery, and bold ascended." In other words, as the classical ethos declined and the new ideas of romanticism arose, Beethoven's stock soared—he was their man.

After giving up the piano for composition, he did just about only that, while giving the occasional piano lesson. But he was also a business man, as he had to curry favor with his courtly patrons, and beg for them to pay up; wheel and deal with publishers, often engaging in rather unsavory tactics like promising the same piece to multiple publishers, or taking commissioning funds for pieces he patently wasn't interested in writing, and then never delivering those pieces; or promising premiere performances to multiple entities. And Beethoven knew the difference between public and private pieces, pieces he wrote for others and those for himself and pieces he wrote to put food and wine on the table (as in the many piano renditions of folk music written for the Scottish publisher who never made money from them but kept trying nonetheless.)

Swafford uses the word *raptus* to describe Beethoven's state in improvisation and composition. It is that place where the composer or creative artist goes when in that blessed realm of creation. (In sports it is called "being in the zone.") A contemporary musical version of this is when, at Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix and his band launch into *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and Jimi goes into his usual state of playing, what could best be described as rapture—he is gone, lifted, in another place of mind, another state.

Beethoven was considered one of the most formidable improvisers of his time. In a wonderful story Swafford describes an improvisational duel, something akin to the battle of the bands that occurred in the 1960's, when a bunch of young rock bands would duke it out in succession. In this case Beethoven's adversary had memorized his performance. Beethoven followed by taking a piece of the gentleman's music from a stand, turning it wrong side up, excising a theme and then ripping off the most gorgeous improvisation imaginable. His opponent, realizing what he is witnessing, slinks off in the middle of Beethoven's performance, acknowledging his defeat.

Swafford tracks this extraordinary ability into the compositional realm. He opines that Beethoven composed in two ways. Swafford makes the case that in the context of variation form in particular, Beethoven excelled so greatly at improvisation that he could whip out many variations, remember and write them down verbatim and then choose those that he thought best (and in this process, as in all of his writing, he was ruthless). It is Swafford's contention that the *Diabelli Variations* and other lesser works (one hesitates to use such a modifier) in this "form" were composed in this way.

Then there is the Beethoven of the worked-over sketches. He would start this compositional process with improvisation at the keyboard and writing down his ideas on the paper at a table beside the piano. He would then work an idea over and over until he finally got to its essence. And then he is off. Whole movements are often forged first through the unfolding of a single line. Swafford surmises that Beethoven knew the accompanying harmonies and would write them in later.

But let us remember that this presupposes certain aspects of Beethoven's style that made this possible. The first is sonata form, less a form than a procedure of dramatic narrative that he imbibed from his forbears—a way of imagining the entire flow of the work. And then there is the matter of common practice language, which suggests at any one time a proscribed world of harmonic possibilities. But as Swafford notes, and as any musician knows, Beethoven took this world and pushed it into places it had never gone before, taking the inherent possibilities of the classical world into the realm of Romanticism, to make his, and music generally, more individual, more singular, more grand.

In many ways he made the music about a quest, rather than a tight little package ready for delivery by FedEx. Finally, walking was a great part of his compositional practice. Beethoven would take one or two walks a day, gesticulating wildly on his way. What *was* he doing? One can surmise that he was feeling the physical quality of the music, not just what it sounded like, but what it felt like, how it "moved." Music, even when not meant for the Dance, is of the mind *and* the body. It takes place over time, or moves through time. Thus, in a way, it is fundamentally about movement, and for us humans that is tied to the physical gestures of movement itself. Beethoven was literally creating those gestures of the music as he walked, feeling its journey. He was also allowing the subconscious to take over, to provide answers to questions that the conscious mind can never find.

He started off as a journeyman in genres where he felt himself in the shadows of Haydn and Mozart, like the symphony and piano concerto respectively. His first symphony, while original and unique, is clearly in the Haydnesque mode, with its slow introduction of the first movement. Swafford suggests a certain awkwardness in moments of the orchestration. His first piano concerto is a virtuoso vehicle for himself, one that he tinkered with over time; it is decidedly Mozartian in provenance and again an apprentice's work. Swafford mentions "its rough transitions, stolid block scoring in the winds and a drifting quality." In other genres, like the cello sonata or piano trio, which were virgin territory, his contributions were from the start unique and revelatory.

His difficulties with *Fidelio* are even more instructive of his compositional approach. Beethoven was not a particularly gifted writer for the voice (his song output is not performed much for good reason), nor a man of the theatre, two aspects that surely help in writing an opera. He was enamored of Cherubini and Rossini, and in a time of the ascendancy and ultimate victory of Italian opera, Beethoven longed for their kind of recognition. After the first not completely successful performance (not all due to the music it must be said, as the audience was comprised mostly of French soldiers who had recently overrun Vienna), and finally being convinced by his friends that there were indeed major problems of pacing and drama, Beethoven went off on a search and destroy mission to make his opera really work on the stage. His multiple attempts at an overture are only one example. He sliced out arias, reconfigured materials, and tightened and tucked.

He desperately wanted this opera to work. And in its own fashion it does, in part because of the heart that Beethoven displays in the piece, which overwhelms some of its dramatic and musical failings. It also works because it contains some breathtakingly gorgeous music, and while this isn't the fashion today, gorgeous music trumps production values and libretto problems every time, because the former endures and the latter qualities are quicksilver, transitory and finally, trivial. It also contains great examples of that "sustained intensity of which few composers other than Beethoven were capable."

Some of Beethoven's innovations were startling. With the third symphony, he makes the exposition, usually a place to introduce the motivic characters and of relative stability, into an unstable terrain of a searching and seeking, if not a seething, quest. He begins to backload his pieces, so that pieces only reach their culmination or "answer" in the final movement.

Which is to say that rather than perceiving a work as a nice balanced entity of independent movements with a proscribed form—think of just about any of Haydn's 106 symphonies—his movements are often interlocked motivically and, by their hierarchical relationship, heading towards a triumphal arrival at the end. He also altered the shape and balance of a piece, by creating codas of gargantuan proportions.

Swafford argues that towards the end of his life Beethoven was working in almost a stream-of-consciousness manner; that he moved from narrative to associational relationships; that his forms became the overlaying of numerous forms on top of each other proceeding simultaneously; and that in the last quartets, written for himself and God, that the conversation is one of many voices proceeding at the same time. In works like the *Hammerklavier Sonata* or the *Grosse Fugue* his music became the first Avant-garde, as it went into the realm of music about music and the possibilities of musical form that broke asunder any previous models.

The book is rife throughout with analyses of significant pieces. But since this is not a theoretical book per se, as Swafford's intention is to provide a cogent context and a way of engaging these works. While brief sections of scores are included for illustrative effect, it is the elegant, evocative and even provocative prose that leads one into a way of active listening and serves as a guide to what one is actually hearing. In its attention to emotive content, matters of structure, provenance, as well as the revealing of motivic relationships both of pitch and rhythm, it is useful for the novice as well as the sophisticate. Helping achieve this result is Swafford's straightforward writing style, which is never academic or dry, but rather like hearing a great bard regaling truthful mysteries around the fire.

Like many of Beethoven's best pieces, this book is also back loaded, which is to say that the endnotes are a mother lode of insightful comments, queries, ponderings, and interactions with the previous literature and the contents of this book. Swafford has read and thought widely, and it is all displayed in this section of probings and discussions.

As with music, after all is said and done, parsed and analyzed, what really matters is where this book takes you emotionally and spiritually. I am not the sentimental type, but while reading *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, I periodically ended up in tears. About how many biographies, musical or otherwise, can this be said?

PART THREE: CHAPTER 22

LETTERS: A RESPONSE TO ROBERT VERBRUGGEN'S ARTICLE "GAMES PEOPLE PLAY"

To the Editor:

In his article "Games People Play" (Winter 2012), a look at the nature of today's video games, Robert VerBruggen makes some rather lofty claims for their importance as a new artistic genre. VerBruggen says that while this pursuit was "once a pleasant diversion—*merely* a game—[it] has become a fascinating form of expression, worthy of serious commentary and criticism." He goes on to suggest that there are serious artists at work here, and that the current excellence of their creations is due to the grand leap in modern processors and their capabilities for precision and expressiveness. I will assume that it is indeed possible that very fine artists/craftsmen are so engaged, and I agree that technology is just grand. But we will need to apply certain longstanding criteria to determine if these endeavors are really "art."

It could be safely said that great craftsmanship has gone into the making of cartoons and film music. But in all true art objects we must deal with the issues of content and the individuality of the creator. The cartoon genre just doesn't allow for much artistic depth, and since most movie music is of a purely subservient nature to the visual, it rarely does either. Hanna-Barbera is not Picasso and John Williams is not Stravinsky. All great art must manifest a high degree of individuality, a quality that video games, by definition, lack.

VerBruggen makes the analogy to the film media. There are only a few great movies, and those that we can agree on have the stamp of the auteur, the director's individual genius. Is it impossible that these relatively new genres will produce true greatness? The existence of the graphic novel *Maus* would suggest otherwise. However, instances will be exceedingly rare.

With regard to music, VerBruggen makes the case that since the London Philharmonic recently recorded a CD of video game music the genre is now to be taken seriously. This radically confuses commerce with art. Just because the LSO thinks they can make money in this way doesn't mean that one should take this incredibly mediocre music seriously. VerBruggen also suggests that video games have taken over the role of expressing beauty to counteract the ugliness in the real art world. This is again to confuse an issue in one sphere with a supposed answer in another. The art world's travails at least exist in the realm of aesthetics, where real beauty resides in the object itself. There is indeed beautiful art being created—one just has to seek it and find it. And by the way, such objects are usually beheld and contemplated for their beauty, not "played with." Video games reside in the world of kitsch, where beauty lies completely in the eye and emotional response of the beholder, especially of boys and young men. (VerBruggen makes much of this being a man's world.)

VerBruggen closes with "there is emerging a subset of games that demand to be considered alongside movies, books, and other forms of art. Serious critics ignore video games at their peril." I think not. Life is too short to spend much time studying this supposed new art genre, because finally it lacks the one other aspect that Jacques Barzun noted years ago: that for something to be studied it should have a degree of "seriousness." Mr. VerBruggen has not persuaded that this new form or genre, either in its content or mode of interaction, in any way suggests this quality. He may enjoy playing these games, but let's not equate this pastime with those of a more elevated nature and content.

PART FOUR

POLEMICS

PART FOUR: CHAPTER 1

THE PUT ON OF THE CENTURY, OR THE CAGE CENTENARY

It is the John Cage Centenary and the 100th birthday of the Rite of Spring. Why is the former so unimportant, and the latter so important? In the last few weeks I heard four full concerts of Stravinsky's work as part of a festival I ran here in Tucson at the University of Arizona. And last night I heard a gorgeous performance by a gifted colleague of Cage's Sonatas and Interludes, which left me mostly frustrated, angry, and irritated. While Cage is being feted this year among my musical colleagues almost as much as Stravinsky, why should this be so, and what does it mean?

Stravinsky's place in the musical pantheon is clear. He and Schoenberg are certainly the two most important composers of the 20th century. There is of course a vast difference between the two. Stravinsky wrote much music that people actually wish to hear, and Schoenberg did not. Does this matter? I think it does.

Let me make a bold proposition in this regard. Music appeals to the mind, emotions, and body. It unites these three aspects of man in a way that perhaps no other art form does. The greatest music thus in some way taps into the listener's life experience, which is of course a journey over time, from birth to death. It is no surprise that music, and the tonal enterprise broadly interpreted, manifests a similar arc. The greatest of music provides musical experiences in the deepest and richest way possible, that provides a sense of transcendence. While I find this goal in almost all of Stravinsky's music, and while I happen to admire much of Schoenberg's output, I think the latter is less successful at uniting these three spheres on a regular basis.

This brings us to Maestro Cage. Where in fact does he fall on this spectrum? As we know, Cage was a student of Schoenberg, who clearly intuited that Cage had no feeling for harmony, considered by Schoenberg to be a basic perquisite for a Western composer. Why did Shoenberg think this? Quite simply, harmony, and thus counterpoint, has been central to Western music for over a thousand years, and it is one of the glories of Western

Civilization, and is a creation of that culture. It has allowed for some of the greatest artistic achievements of mankind. So what was Cage's response. He famously said that he would knock his head against the wall of harmony and counterpoint, and see what the results were. His philosophical understanding that guided his first works was that music is to sooth the soul and calm the mind. Sonatas and Interludes is emblematic of this first period. Let's see wherein the problems lie.

The work lasts over an hour. Most works in the repertoire of this duration contain a sizeable amount of contrast, musical and emotional. They offer an architectonic form that makes sense of this time frame. Sonatas and Interludes offers many movements that add up to no perceivable aural structure. The emotional landscape is limited and proscribed, ultimately wan and shadowy.

The work is for prepared piano, a creation of Cage's. Various materials are placed between the strings to produce percussive sounds as well as pitched sounds that are outside of common Western tuning. Cage, by necessity, gives up on what is commonly called pitch relations. In his world, all sounds are equal, thus depriving the listener of any hierarchical relationship, and the sense of consonance and dissonance that is created within that environment. The pitch world created is placid and flaccid. While occasional sounds are quite beautiful, the pitches/sounds themselves never quite add up to anything; which is to say melody or motive is rarely present. If it is true that the ear and brain seek to add information up into some form of gestalt, as neuroscientists now tell us, Cage frustrates this possibility. And while music is based on the frustration and ultimate resolution of expectations, the Cageian frustration is never overcome. The materials sound random, dimensionless, adrift, like a wind chime.

The music is mostly quiet, a dynamic associated perhaps with the thoughts of introspection and quietude. Unfortunately, in this music the lack of dynamic quality acts like a gentle tranquilizer, dulling the mind's capability of perception. It does indeed sooth, but so does a nice massage, but the latter is not presented as an artistic expression. The registral range used, that space of high and low frequencies that we hear, is generally rather limited, again producing not much sense of variation. Rhythms are based on a very limited vocabulary that are used over and over ad nauseum, rarely building into any perceivable units.

The result of all of this is a music sadly lacking in any directionality, a music that is essentially rudderless. The music is emotionally bland and

lackluster, its contours in this regard terribly narrow. Lastly, rather than engaging the mind, this is a music that purposely demands the mind be held at a distance, in abeyance. Ultimately, the music is simply downright sophomoric and boring. In Cage's latter and final chance period, by the way, matters only got much, much worse in regards to all of the above.

So where does this leave us? Cage argues the following, "If you think something is boring, try doing it for two minutes. If you still think it's boring, try it for four. If you still think it's boring, try it for eight, then sixteen, then thirty-two, and so on and so forth. Soon enough you'll find that it's really not boring at all." I think not, as boredom simply wears you down. And alas, life is too short to waste in boring activities. I think most of my colleagues ultimately think this too. It is not uncommon for composers and musicians to find Cage's ideas intriguing or provocative, but to find these same folks in the lobby during performances of the music, because they find it so tedious. The problem here is that the art itself should be of great interest in any medium, and what is said about it of lesser or secondary interest. This is of course the inverse with Cage.

So why is Cage lauded? I think his transgressive, stick-it-in your face approach finds resonance with those who think they hate the Western musical tradition, for its supposed patriarchal and masterwork approach. I think his oceanic view of rationality versus chance finds acceptance in a time which is profoundly anti-rational, and therefore unwilling to make serious artistic judgements regarding real quality, including those of genre. I think his trickster qualities, borrowed from the ultimate trickster, Duchamp, perfectly reflect our time's sense of profound unseriousness. Because, while art for most is not a matter of life or death, it does profoundly reflect our understanding and approach to ultimate values, and I have never heard "fun" described as an ultimate value to rival those old fogies of beauty, truth, and justice. But I fear this is where we are now in the culture.

So, if you want the real thing, forgo Cage for Stravinsky. Listen for starters to the earth-shattering Rite, the remarkably pithy Three Japanese Lyrics, the transcendent Symphony of Psalms, and In Memoriam Dylan Thomas. In a few years' time, Cage will be a small footnote to all of this, remembered if at all, for his self-advertising, whimsy and smile, and love of mushrooms. But for his music, not a chance.

PART FOUR: CHAPTER 2

THE POLITICS OF NEW MUSIC

It is chic in sophisticated musical circles to suggest that all music is equal. Which is to say, that all music has the same value, or the possibility of value; that the experience received from any music, if not the same, is of equal worth. To suggest otherwise would be, in all likelihood, to discriminate and show poor judgment. Thus, we should admire hip hop or country, klezmer or mariachi, pop or classical, world music or jazz, as different manifestations of the human spirit. Since all of these musics are made of tone, rhythm, color, dynamics, and melody, and all express human emotion in some form or other, that is where judgment should stop. We are forbidden to judge relative merit, as in our time, all music is self-evidently equal on the playing field of sound.

This attitude is also to be found in the post-minimalist contemporary music community, where it is the norm for composers to pride themselves on their keen relation to pop music, the folk tradition, the influence of shaped note music, the sound of a Bulgarian women's chorus, or Tibetan chant, to name a few. Anything, that is, except for the tradition of Western music.

The glories of Western music are eschewed: recognizable melody, counterpoint, and harmony. But most importantly, the two factors which should knit all of these elements together are spurned—continuity of argument, and a sense of motion, directionality, as well as a teleological relationship to time. There is also the question of a style that has some relationship, and provides continuity, to the past—the longer the better, George Rochberg would have said—and that allows for a multiplicity of emotion and the possibility of surprise; a music that is supple and detailed, and worth returning to for many hearings.

That most post-minimal music is also political should be no surprise. Whether regaling us about the poor and downtrodden, the evils of war, sexual liberation of various stripes and kinds, the rights of workers, or the

ubiquitous dangers to Mother Earth, this music has a pervasive, and not usually very subtle, political and moral tone.

There is a self-evident problem with this: the best music is moral in and of itself, as it leads to a deeper understanding of our human nature. Music whose content itself is moral or political only ends up being kitsch and provides no emotional sustenance—it is superficial, bland, and maybe even downright harmful. Or as Roger Scruton writes in his book *Beauty*: "Works of art are forbidden to moralize, only because moralizing destroys their true moral value, which lies in the ability to open our eyes to others. Many of the aesthetic faults incurred by art are moral faults—sentimentality, insincerity, self-righteousness, moralizing itself." If the modernists were trying to hold onto, and continue the importance of, the tradition through its radical transformation—Picasso of the cubist phase, Stravinsky of the *Rite of Spring*, and Eliot of *The Waste Land*—they also wanted to avoid the kitsch of popular culture. Through the difficulty of their respective arts they wished to be removed from the masses, and in fact provide barriers to access their art.

But they later found a middle ground, the blending of difficulty—or better, richness—with accessibility.

Today, the passion and zeal to find that middle path has dried up—instead, pandering is the order of the day. The goal now is to merge and blend with popular culture; in fact, become an offshoot of it, a little branch on its hulking trunk. Years ago I could sympathize with this desire. There was a time in the 1970s when this engagement was thought possible and even artistically viable, when free jazz and new classical music seemed to be striving for the same sensibility. There seemed to be a congruence of ideas that animated Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*, Weather Report, Ornette Coleman, McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra, and the new music of Robert Dick, Sal Martinano, early Steve Reich and Philip Glass, Earle Brown, and Bernstein. Yet, as with Gunther Schuller's Third Stream of the 1950s and 1960s, this too led to an artistic cul-de-sac. The commonalities and areas of intersection disappeared rather quickly and each side went its own way. As a side note, Schuller was also very clear to differentiate between the fecund world of jazz and contemporary classical music and the banal world of commercial music, his reference to pop.

But jazz and classical music have diminished in importance under the onslaught of popular culture, which is no better defined than by pop music. No matter what the sub-genres, and they are legion, everyone—the kid in

the TV ad, Meryl Streep, doctors and lawyers, the cabbie, and post-minimal contemporary composers—wants to be a rock star. And like the rock star, no one wishes to grow up. The politics of transgression and alienation present in the music is part and parcel of a fixed adolescent behavior; in a fifty-year-old with kids and a mortgage this is a little odd, if not just dumb—and this dumbness is reflected in a dumbed-down music. For the most part, pop music is bad stuff. Its tunes are anodyne, freeze-dried, lacking any substance. Its rhythm is base and never changing. The music starts nowhere and goes nowhere—it has no function other than to cause excitement in the listener. It has no true line of argument, and contains no musical thought. It is a vapid music with no consequential content. It is a vehicle for the performer, for and about the cult of the performer, and hardly at all about music itself. It is demonstrative of the extreme narcissism of our time. (For more on the ideas synthesized here, see Roger Scruton's *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*, 2000, Chapter 10.)

Sad to say, this has also been the case more generally in the classical music world for some time now, with the ascension of the conductor and performer to the top of the hierarchy. The music is subservient to the cult of their personality. As Joseph Horowitz writes, it began in this country with the deification of the Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini. It continued with the celebrity status of Leonard Bernstein, as in the ordering of names on CDs, Bernstein's Beethoven, as if Ludwig just wouldn't be important without Lenny to promote him. This continues in our time with the rise of the *young conductor*, from Dudamel on down. Not that a number of them might not already be truly great, old souls in young bodies, but it should be understood in the field of conducting that life experience, and so greater age and maturity, goes hand in hand with a deepening of insight brought to the music. But no one now really cares about this matter, or can tell the difference.

There is, of course, also the problem of the absenteeism of the jet-setting conductor. Is there any other business that allows its CEO to be a CEO at a rival company simultaneously? Can the head of United be the captain of America at the same time? Can Pete Carroll coach the Seahawks and the Steelers simultaneously? Oh yes, there are differences to be sure between a conductor and a CEO and a coach—but just how much? Many orchestras now will not commission or perform the music of composers over forty, let alone recently dead ones, assuming that the younger audience they hope for must be entertained by their peers. The older canon is played, but the recent past is gone. Conductors and artistic administrators seem not to know that many composers, like conductors, actually get better with age,

and that there is a legacy of composers of the recent past, particularly American composers, whose music they should be championing. And these young conductors certainly don't know the American canon or the history of American music, and have no interest in learning it, nor presenting it to their audiences.

The situation is analogous in the post-minimalist world of contemporary music. It began, I suspect, with the cult status assigned to John Cage, wherein his writings and personal characteristics—I am thinking of his pixie-like demeanor and smile; his fondness for picking mushrooms; his interest in Zen; his anti-institutional and general anti-bourgeois stance—became more important than the music. It also involves the notion that as long as there is a stance of utmost seriousness, this somehow disallows, or makes irrelevant, the act of judgment of the music on the part of the listener. How else to explain the case of Cage's performances of amplified scrapings of cactus, simply a silly idea from the get-go? Another example is Laurie Anderson, who very early took on the persona of a rock performer, with all of the paraphernalia of amplification, cool and trendy hair and costumes, and video used as accompaniment, both in her live shows and as the primary means of purveying the product. Her early breakout piece, *Oh Superman*, is an unbridled appeal to an unthougthful, unthinking adolescent politics. It has an admittedly catchy tune, steady pulse, and a woeful bounty of two chords. It seems to aim for a drug-inspired somnambulism. Her persona has not changed since then.

Another case is Meredith Monk. She started off with extended vocal techniques and works of minimal/tonal content in the 1970s with pieces like those on her album *Key*, exploring simple vocal overlays and the world between speech/non-speech and music, including timbral transformation. Much was, by necessity, improvised, and performance was done in a faux séance-like or "spiritual" setting. She then later moved to multi-media work involving dance/movement/video and music, and to pure orchestra pieces. Perhaps her work should be placed with such ecstatics as the dancer Isadora Duncan, or the jazz performer Keith Jarrett, as exemplified in his Köln Concert. But here is the rub: while Monk's art may be about community and innocence, and, like Cage's, very, very serious—when it comes right down to it, the music is incredibly and sensationally thin.

Lastly, I will mention briefly the music of Yoko Ono, resurrected for us recently by MOMA. While given a laudatory review in the *New York Times*, here is another cross-disciplinary artist, a mother of the avant-garde. Her music is mostly comprised of a background of mediocre rock music

with her shrieking above it all her own banal texts. It is pathetic both as conceptual art and for its musical content, or lack thereof.

With the likes of Anderson's *Superman*, or Frederic Rzewski's *Coming Together*, one might ask if one isn't encountering something on the order of Susan Sontag's take in the *New York Review of Books* back in the 1970s of the new Leni Riefenstahl—namely that she wasn't much different from the old one. Whether glorifying Hitler or the women of Nubia, she fetishized the body, or uniforms, or power, putting beauty at the service of a fascist philosophy. Thus the art is kitsch of the worst order, as it is kitsch that can glorify the worst acts of mankind. *Superman* and *Coming Together* do the same and result in the same kitsch. As Sontag writes:

> These ideals are vivid and moving to many people, and it is dishonest—and tautological—to say that one is affected by *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympiad* because they were made by a film maker of genius. Riefenstahl's films are still effective because, among other reasons, their longings are still felt, because their content is a romantic ideal to which many continue to be attached, and which is expressed in such diverse modes of cultural dissidence and propaganda for new forms of community *as the youth/rock culture, primal therapy, Laing's antipsychiatry, Third World camp-following, and belief in gurus and the occult* [emphasis mine]. The exaltation of community does not preclude the search for absolute leadership; on the contrary, it may inevitably lead to it. (Not surprisingly, a fair number of the young people now prostrating themselves before gurus and submitting to the most grotesquely autocratic discipline are former anti-authoritarians and anti-elitists of the 1960s.)

This seems to have remained current in our own situation. Leni was on the Right and most in the new music community are on the Left. Many in the new music community, however, prostrate themselves to new or old gurus, and submit to a newfound allegiance to a distorted set of musical and political principles. A respected colleague spoke recently in wonder of the new primitivism of various sects in Brooklyn; he was not speaking of a new branch of religious fundamentalism, but of various composer groups who tout their lack of formal musical training, or who seek a return to a music that itself is primitive. Something similar happened in the early part of the twentieth century—it didn't get music very far then and it won't now. There are also those who were trained at our most respected musical institutions and pretend to act innocently of the entire musical past, and encourage a new form of Merry Pranksterism among their acolytes—the result of which was, and is, a puerile condition. Or those who glom onto the latest irritant

from Europe, be it French spectralism or the wisps of sound from a still Nazi-traumatized Germany.

Riefenstahl went on to photograph Mick Jagger, who embodies the notion that the pose is all. (One of my greatest fears is that I will be in the old-age home on my walker, and I shuffle down the halls to the canned music of— what else—"I can't get no satisfaction"—over and over and over again!) That pose, and all it represents, is increasingly prominent in our post-minimal new music, and general classical music, communities. Perhaps we are in the time of a new Rococo period, like that which came after J. S. Bach, when his music was considered old-fashioned, and his sons and others took over with a music of lightness, effervescence, style, and emptiness.

PART FOUR: CHAPTER 3

CARTER IS DEAD

Carter is dead! I state the obvious, as composer Elliott Carter died a few months ago at the age of 103. But then again, I am also alluding to the figurative sense, as in the Boulezian dismissal of Schoenberg with the same statement. Boulez's statement was a quasi-totalitarian one, in that he decried Schoenberg's usage of old forms, even his process of narrative progression through time, as antithetical to the demands of the new post-World War II age. He dismissed all composers as simply irrelevant who didn't comprehend the necessity for the use of the 12-tone system and the manner in which he stated it should be used. It was the cry of a right-wing revolutionary. Schoenberg and his music seem to have survived the attack, and we shall see of the fate of the music of Boulez. But what of the music of Carter?

In looking at Carter's music, I am proposing no such blanket condemnation, and at least not in such a thoroughly polemical manner. What I am suggesting is a serious re-appraisal of the only thing that matters—the music.

Carter's death has brought about a number of hagiographic articles confirming his stature as one of the greatest American composers of the latter half of the twentieth century. He finds approval and embraces from some of our finest conductors and performers. This is somewhat perplexing, because even among his musical and compositional friends, while they found Carter quite likeable, few, it is said, really liked his music.

Carter was a steady and prolific composer right up to the end of his long life. A man of wealth, correct education (Harvard), and European credentials (studied with Boulanger), he found his way into music even though, like Copland, coming from a household largely indifferent to the arts.

His early works, such as the "Holiday Overture" and the "Piano Sonata," display an ability to get notes onto the page in a pleasant and felicitous manner. The language is broadly tonal, with the niceties of a tonal journey,

as in clearly articulated beginnings and endings, as well as the requisite and well-placed climax.

The "Sonata" displays narrative and emotional continuity. There is comprehensibility in his polyphonic textures. Fantasy-like moments are presented but never distract from the onward flow. There is even a quality of tenderness or the occasional moment of introspection. While perhaps a bit too long and sometimes structurally obtuse, the piece works.

His "Cello Sonata" shows a strong lyrical quality and adeptness at putting together larger scale architecture. While he suggests the instruments have different personalities, a successful and hierarchical relationship is always present and heard. The vivace has a wry and humorous opening, with scurrying fast notes; a combative middle section, as the two instruments are responsive to each other and a jazzy quality pervades the final section with running pizzicatos in the cello and dryly articulated fast notes in the piano. The adagio is more discursive and improvisatory. There is a wide emotional range present and the two voices respond to each other's flights of fancy. In the final Vivace, while the voices are operating in different time frames, it is impossible not to hear them in relationship to each other. While Carter might protest, the gestalt of hearing ensures this. The work is unified by its rhythmic unfolding even more so than by its pitch material, which is actually somewhat bland. The work ends through a process of liquidation, namely adding more rests and taking out more notes, with a little more of that jazz-like pizzicatos. All is tidy and, well . . . cute.

The "Eight Etudes" and "A Fantasy" (1952) are light and clean but don't hold up very well. They are just too slight and tongue-in-cheek. Only the "Fantasy" retains its charm and whimsy.

These works suggest a decent ear but not a great one. Or perhaps more to the point, they demonstrate a certain blandness of personality. While the pieces are well-done, they simply don't have a clarity of purpose, a sense of being highly profiled. They are nice, genteel, but hardly demand or command our attention. It is perhaps worth noting that while Copland (a friend) strongly recommended Carter's "Pocahontas Suite," a piece of this same period to Koussevitsky—the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra—he was not convinced by the piece and didn't perform it. Also, the "Piano Sonata" and "Night Fantasies" (and all of his piano music for that matter) pale next to Copland's three major piano works, the "Piano Variations," "Piano Sonata" and "Piano Fantasy."

It is at this juncture that Carter took a big breath and pondered his future music. Perhaps sensing the somewhat proscribed nature of his past output Carter decided on a new path. This was his formulation of the notion of instruments having different personalities and displaying their defining characteristics, be the individuals (solos) or groups (small ensembles), with very different languages, as expressed with different interval usage and different rates of rhythmic flow. While an interesting proposition, there is a fundamental problem with this notion; a conversation, to be intelligible, must at least be held in one language. Carter's methodology ends up like a conversation in different languages, and thus is utterly incomprehensible. In the brashness of this decision he was very much hooking up with the nascent European Avant-garde that privileged idea over sound and philosophical exegesis over beauty. While not a party member, he certainly became a fellow traveler.

And while never a serialist, Carter's music has similar surface and pitch qualities in its complete rejection of any relationship to tonality and its avoidance of any notions of dissonance and consonance, and their relationship to each other. In other words, his usage of intervals in relationship to these concepts is almost nil. The compulsion to join in must have seemed overwhelming, as it affected Stravinsky and Copland no less. Carter used a different note technique but he arrived in a very similar terrain, one void of a predictive quality, and rather bleak and barren.

His approach to time and structure is similarly obtuse. Differing rates of movement in different parts of the orchestra, or the simultaneous creation of different architectural shapes, while an interesting and intriguing idea, just can't be realized with his musical materials. It is like trying to play with the onward rushing of different streams of colored water; sooner or later they mix into a very boring shade of continual grayness.

Carter wrote works in this newly found voice that begin with the "String Quartet No. 1" and the "Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord" (1952). Both pieces are less than successful. There is a profusion of ideas, however ill-defined or amorphous, but the rhythmic flow keeps them in the same frame. Shards of musical material are thrown out, with sharp contrasts. Nothing is terribly memorable, as the musical gestures fail to add up. Notes remain completely on the surface, floating free as isolated atoms; nothing binds them together, not any true musical sense. At least in this transitional phase he still uses the occasional ending gesture, which gives a modest sense of phrasing. Vertical sonorities have little meaning, at least certainly

in their relationship to each other. The idea of conversation seems an odd one as no one actually ever seems to be conversing with each other.

The disintegration into chaos proceeds apace in the next six decades. This is displayed in the "Symphony of Three Orchestras," the "Concerto for Orchestra," "Piano Concerto," and more recently, "Sceravole," in the orchestral realm, in the string quartets two-five, and in many piano works, from the "Night Fantasies" to the much latter "Intermittences."

David Schiff notes about the "Concerto for Orchestra" in a recent article: that appeared in the *Nation*

> [H]e found ways to combine European and American developments on his own terms. His music became more disjointed, percussive and unsettled . . . Leonard Bernstein, who had never performed Carter's music before (and never would again), conducted the premiere performances and the first recording.

Schiff alludes to the fact that Bernstein must not have particularly warmed up to the piece. It should be noted that Bernstein wasn't impressed by the fact that Carter wasn't aware that the clarinetist was playing in the wrong transposition for much of the piece. But why should the qualities of "disjointed and unsettled" be matters for appreciation? These qualities remain in his music right to the very end. And why, when certain pitch relations were important to Carter, and he apparently couldn't detect errant pitches, shouldn't this suggest serious reservations about the composer and his music?

Schiff further notes "All this derangement produces a hallucinatory effect as the sound washes from one direction to another in changing combinations of timbres." What Schiff might note is that chaos clearly reigns over order, or more importantly, that the pitches, whether as a single line, as polyphony, or as harmonic structures, have ceased to make any coherent sense. Berlioz, in "Symphony Fantastique," makes audible and musical sense of the opium or drug trip in Carter, it is just a bad trip. Why should this experience be celebrated or acclaimed? Schiff describes the first climax of the piece which occurs early on, as a "cacophonous tsunami for the entire orchestra" and an "apocalyptic explosion." I would concur with this assessment. However, I would also add that it is one of an undifferentiated sort, not particularly related to any musical idea of the work, and thus, sounds like an adolescent tantrum. This kind of cataclysmic and destructive sound (a tsunami is nothing if not destructive) had already been done earlier by Penderecki in "Threnody for Hiroshima," another adolescent

work from which that composer wisely retreated in his latter and more mature music.

Schiff notes that in the 1930s Carter existed in Copland's shadow, with "only the occasional hint of a distinctive voice, let alone musical genius." He then suggests that the new Carter did indeed find that musical genius. I think not and here is why: Carter, like Cage, gave up his ear for an idea. Can we really relinquish the heard realities of dissonance and consonance, or the ear's desire to seek out a musical totality or gestalt? Can different moods be so quickly traversed without producing chaos or undifferentiated boredom, a problem also noted with the quick and repeated presence of all twelve pitches, or the complete filling of the entire registral space, almost all of the time? Can a wild flotsam and jetsam surface really make up for any sense of deep note coherence?

And then we come finally to the problem of time in Carter's music. Like the moment-form pieces of his European brethren, his music is in the always present, without past or future. The severe disjointedness that Schiff describes guarantees this. In this, the latter music corresponds to the pathological condition of dementia, a psychological form — and a most uncomfortable one—of being in the eternal present. And while Carter and others seem to think that time development, as in metric modulation, can replace tonality, it can't and does not, because music is not primarily about time any more than are the occurrences in our lives. Both happen in time and make us aware of the passing of time, but they are primarily about making and finding moments of meaning. These moments are rarely to be found in Carter's music.

A number of years ago I attended an all-Carter concert played by some of his most important admirers. They are truly great virtuosi, but even their technique and interpretive powers could not bring coherence to a music in which there is so little. For to produce finely etched music demands a great ear, a large heart, a rich and deep personality, and an unerring sense of drama and pacing. Carter just didn't have it to give, or he thought he was on to something better, but wasn't. His deluded music of the eternal present will sadly have little future.

PART FOUR: CHAPTER 4

AN OPEN LETTER TO A NEW UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

Dear President:

I am the fellow who sent you flowers on one of your first days on the job back in August. You have been President now for about 5 months, give or take a few. My hope is that you are getting the lay of the land, your sea-legs (in a location short of water) so to speak. I thought it is about time for us to talk about the state of the University. As you know this is a rather large subject, but it seemed to me, that since it is the start of a new calendar year, now is as good a time as any to begin.

I have decided to let the public eavesdrop on our conversation. Since we are both employees of the state, it is the public's right to know of our conversation, even if it is a little one-sided, as I am doing most of the talking. My ruminations will cover both large and small issues, in no particular order of importance, and will range from the philosophical to historical, the lofty to the mundane. Hopefully by the end of this letter I will have touched on issues that we might wish to continue speaking about, because these issues affect not just the two of us, but our entire community, as well as the country.

To begin, let me mention in memoriam two great men who died recently who will have an impact on the contents of this letter. John Silber was one of the great university presidents of the past fifty years. As the leader of Boston University, he transformed that institution from a second rate University into one of world stature. He did it by being outspoken, difficult, and confrontational. He did not accept the status quo, and he spoke the truth as he saw it. Thus, he was considered a pain in the rear by just about one and all, but, and it is a huge but, he actually accomplished something.

Jacque Barzun was one of our most down-to-earth cultural and educational critics, whose mind ranged wide and far. He was also for many years one of the Columbia University's top administrators. His life in

academia traversed the years of the secluded university to its postwar (that's WWII) transformation into a worldly multiversity, the unwieldy beast that we confront today.

Why do I mention these two gentlemen, and recommend them to you? I do so for the simple reason that you have some important choices to make. Our past four presidents were here on average about 5-6 years. They each collected about two million dollars in their service to the institution, and presided over it with magnanimity, and effectively did little to alter its culture. Maybe this is an impossible task, like quickly changing the course of a large ocean-going ship. But I don't think they understood the real task. So your choice is, will you tackle some of the big issues, or just pass on through like your predecessors. Silber and Barzun decided to have a real effect on the nature of the university. The question is, will you?

The university is part of the larger culture, and thus participates in its strengths and weaknesses. We are at the height of an educational bubble, not unlike the housing bubble of a few years ago. Tuition cannot continue its constant rise at unprecedented rates, as most of the costs are absorbed by students receiving higher subsidies from the government, which is quickly going broke. When the bubble bursts, it will not be a pretty picture. GM had to cut Pontiac when it went into bankruptcy. You should be looking at what your going to be cutting or spinning-off right now. Why not send some of the professional schools on their way? How are hospitals and cancer centers part of the primary educational mission? Get 'em off the books. Cut as much as possible of the bureaucratic waste that has built-up over the last fifty years. Get rid of study areas that have no reason, other than political ones, for existing, and if there is any decent scholarship resident there, fold it into established departments. If we no longer act in loco parentis in regards to sex and drugs, why coddle students in regard to their physical and psychic health, or try to better the apartments and fitness centers of the private sector, unless there is a clear added value we provide? Why do we have our own police department when the city's should do? Why have a catering division when it is cheaper and better to order in?

The University is not primarily a welfare agency, social institution, employer, community, values inculcator, provider of research studies for government or business, creator of spin-offs of high-tech or bio companies. The institution's primary job is to educate. If it is not spending most of its time, energy, and money on this mission, it is failing.

And that we are failing is no longer a matter of debate—it is fact. Like most institutions of higher learning, studies show that students know about as much coming in as they do going out. They achieve little to no gains in critical thinking, or the abilities to express themselves verbally or in writing. They will not know much about the course and breadth of American history, and they will know almost nothing of the civilizational qualities that have made this country so exceptional. They will not know how their democracy functions, and they will know nothing of the economic system which has led them to unprecedented heights of healthiness and life expectancy, material comforts undreamed of by previous generations, and the ability to lead their lives in relative freedom. They routinely study less than twelve hours per week, less than half of the norm of a generation ago, but their grades are higher. They view college life as a place for a good four-year social experience.

They will not know what they should because we have let them down. They have been let down by all the major components of this institution: faculty, administrators, regents, and alumni. Let's take each of these separately and then in the way they interact.

The faculty of the UA is not unsimilar to those at any other good university. There are those who take their work very seriously, some who coast, and some who should have left long ago. They all find themselves however in the same environment, one that is predicated on the post WWII scientific model. They are governed by the trifecta of research, teaching, and service, expressed here in the order of institutional importance. Research, in the scientific sense, means forward thinking, implies or necessitates big labs, big expenditures of money (usually of the federal type), and great benefits for mankind. The problem of course is that it requires huge amounts of time, a huge bureaucracy, paperwork, adherence to Federal requirements and regulations, and a huge institutional investment. And that is just the start of it. The research model has infected all other areas, namely the social sciences, and arts and humanities, where it generally doesn't apply, is counterproductive, and distorts the nature of those enterprises. Do we actually need "research" on the social effects of Scoobie-Doo, or the implications of the music of the Beasty Boys, or the manifestations of hip-hop culture?

In this regard, it is time to look at the curriculum and how it is created. There is no longer any center to the curriculum, no requirements other than distributional ones. It is a world where all knowledge is considered of equal value, and thus, of no value. We offer our students no path or guidance

through this morass. Faculty often teach to their particular research area, rather than to anything of universal significance. The curriculum is so broad as to be comical. What this does not produce is a generation of any common understandings or language. Thus, this generation will find it even more difficult to speak with each other, to actually be understood.

Teaching is evaluated by the students. How is it possible for students to know what they should be learning? Only malfeasance, such as a professor not showing up or not preparing could show up on this kind of instrument. The system is presently gamed, as faculty know that the surest way to get good evaluations is to make the class as easy as possible and provide all students with a good grades. No one complains, as parents think their children are doing well and administrators and faculty don't have to hassle with students arguing about their grades. The only losers are the students who haven't learned much, and society, namely employers who get employees who are skill-less and unknowledgeable, and a democracy that gets participants who are aren't capable of making informed decisions.

Service is an amorphous category that includes sitting on various committees, either departmental, school, or university. This is a part of perceived rather than real democracy, as most decisions of consequence are made by administrators. It can also be accounted for by the participation in national educational organizations or other scholarly organizations, as well as local faculty governance.

The problem is that there is generally almost no serious debate of any serious issue. The reason for this is that most faculties are now engaged in groupthink, generally of the liberal kind. Again, this is just fact not conjecture. Faculties are universally liberal, with the areas of the social sciences and humanities being almost exclusively so. Thus, in matters that should really matter to the institution and society at large, uniformity of opinion is already assured. There is no diversity of thought at this or any other university, and this is a travesty. I can assure you that in matters that require serious discussion, none will be found here. Barzun notes this phenomenon in the sixties (it has gotten exponentially worse since then) and asks the truly prescient question, would (or have) American faculty caved into a unitary view of the world, in the same way German faculty did with National Socialism (Nazi ideology)? I would say sadly that this is already the case.

Our students are a difficult lot. They have had educations in K-12 that have been generally lackluster; they have been allowed to coast; standards

are not rigorous, and certainly not enforced; but their self-esteem is very high, as is their sense of entitlement. They care mostly about education for the credential they will obtain, are thus obsessed with grades rather than learning. Perhaps as the result of divorce, they are emotionally flat, lacking any sense of personal awareness of their internal emotional world. They are careful to avoid judgment lest they offend, and thus their watchword is "whatever."

Administrators have a difficult task. They must keep this mass of divergent interests somehow in working order. Faculty and students alike wish to be left alone to pursue their own interests. The ever-present lack of money compounds the problem. But then this scarcity has always been, so it shouldn't persist as an ever- present irritant. As Chief Administrator I don't envy you. But how might you improve this situation? Make sure that you are hearing the voices of not just those around you, who, as in all such situations, have a tendency to please, and thus rarely disagree. Make sure you seek out contrarian opinions, because you will not hear them unless you do so.

The Regents should be ensuring the quality of the education being presented by the University. They should ensure that it is not politicized. They are not fulfilling these tasks.

This brings us to another issue, that of sports. In regards to this issue, you cannot act alone, but only in concert with your peers. The professionalization of sports on campus is a major moral issue. If society wishes to reward those who engage in professional sports at the level it does, this is at least a function of a free market responding to the public's desires. It doesn't impinge on any other business or enterprise. Sadly this is not the case in academia. The present position of sports in the academy is a disaster for morale, and compromises the entire institution. Student athletes who would never be admitted because they don't have the tools or capacity to succeed in the University are nonetheless admitted. Vast resources are put at their disposal to ensure that they will not fail in the limited number of classes they will take. It is known that they are present only until they are drafted or become promising to their professional brethren. This is supported all with tax deductible contributions which should compromise the integrity of the not-for-profit status of the university. Salaries of coaches are at a level that again strains the relationship of faculty and administrators. To suggest that this is somehow in line with market forces makes a joke of that concept.

The role of alumni, and alumni giving, in all of this is also suspect and within your purview. It is said that sports departments are revenue neutral. I don't think this is possibly true, particularly when one puts into the equation precious space taken for buildings and their maintenance. Even if it were, the decline it produces in moral capital among the participants is overwhelming. Alumni should be strongly encouraged to give their money to units other than sports. Football and basketball teams should become farm teams of their respective sports, as already exists in baseball.

You should not accept money that encourages new programs that are in response to a momentary phenomenon, no matter how much money is thrown your way. As tragic as the shooting was a year ago, a Civility Institute is not a needed or welcomed response. Couldn't a response have found a place in a political science course or religion? Politically motivated murders, not to mention brotherly strife (Cain and Able, Isaac and Ishmael, come to mind), are, I hope, mentioned in the occasional course, and in a context that might even enrich the student.

Alumni and other givers should be encouraged to give money to those areas of true educational importance and efficacy. This argument needs to be made by you and other administrators. It must be clear whether a gift actually benefits or compromises the institution. I certainly don't have to tell you about associated costs. You know that it is rare the gift that is in fact a free lunch.

Barzun wrote his book *The American University* in 1968. The difficulties he perceived then have only grown larger. So let's end this round of discussion with some sound-bites from his summary chapter "The Choice Ahead," with my commentary and annotations to help define where we are today. I will paraphrase some of Barzun's comments in the interest of brevity and directness.

A university must have a center. What is the modern university's center? My sense would be that it is Big Science and Big Sports. Does this comprise a sufficient educational "center"? I think not, but this is about all that is ever heard from or about.

"The faculty, which is the university, must convey at every turn what education is…" The faculty has abdicated in this responsibility, and younger faculty simply don't know that this is their obligation and primary task.

"SIMPLIFY . . . The method is austerity, (or more correctly put) sobriety."

"In the new university too much goes on, and not enough; too many courses are offered, at an insufficient density of instruction." This is due to faculty inability to address the problem, plain and simple. You and the Provost should suggest that all Deans address this problem. All curricula should be trimmed. The demands of certain areas, departments, or schools, that to be competent, students must take only courses in the area of their major, or that it need take five years, is simply preposterous and the result of myopia and a specialist's hubris.

The reason for the existence of the University is that it is "the guardian of learning. This implies that academic scholarship turn serious about its significance . . . " The term is to mean the "opposite of solemn on one side and make-believe on the other."

It is not unusual in English departments now for students not to have to take a course on Shakespeare, widely understood as the greatest writer in the English language. The majority of our students have either never heard of Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven, or never seen an image produced by the first two and never heard a work by the latter three. Any, and all, supposedly educated persons need to have encountered these geniuses and their works; without this, the tradition will be broken, and then, ultimately lost. We stand on the shoulders of the geniuses of the past, and nothing current can be truly known, evaluated, and then yes, ultimately judged, without the context that the past provides. We have become, and will continue to be, shallow creatures without this confrontation with greatness.

How is this transformation to be achieved? You and the provost should mandate a "reduction in teaching loads and course offerings, coerced (I would add silly) research," and by so doing, demand a return to seriousness. You should state, and require of your faculty, that they cease their incessant relativism, and recognize that "truth is what learning is after." There may be different understandings of what this means in the different disciplines, but this is the strength of the university. Students must be taught that different truth systems can co-exist, that they might actually broaden our understanding of the world. Thus, religion and science can mutually reinforce each other, as one exists to define our moral relationship to each other, and the other seeks to understand the laws of the universe. That they each now seem to function in relationship to the Unknowable (also known as God) would make for a truly interesting cross-disciplinary conversation.

Maybe it is worth your mentioning to our students that there is no short-cut in real education. It is hard work, requires lots of times, and can't be undertaken haphazardly, or as a side event. This will happen only if faculty are brought on board to rigorously enforce academic standards.

The University is not a business, a welfare agency, a political agency, and definitely not a democracy. We cannot do everything for all. To recover its independence and freedom it needs only two characteristics, courage and self-knowledge. "Not all good things are good for us." Education (and not indoctrination) is our task. University endowment or state subsidy, or state given land, is for education; "it is misuse of funds and talent to embark on other than educational efforts." How then, can the expenditure of treasure and time in what is all but in name, professional sports, be justified? In this matter you, and your colleagues across the country, need to stand up to your alumni, civic interest groups, ESPN, and Nike, and say no, this is not what we are about. When someone wishes to give you money with the beneficent idea of creating something like the National Institute for Civility (rather Orwellian in sound, don't you think), politely say, "While a good cause, no thanks, this isn't central to our mission." The university should not be afraid of its own dignity. We should never cease to underscore the inherent dignity of education, and education for its own worth, aside from its value in future earning power, or as a credential for future employment.

And lastly, let's talk about you as president. If anybody needs rescue, or to be simplified, it would be your position. Because you are, or should be, head of the university. You shouldn't be the chief fundraiser, or a political hand shaker. Your job is not to make faculty, staff, or students, happy. Your chief function is to ensure that the institution fulfills its primary mission, providing the highest quality education possible. If this means ruffling feathers and kicking butt a la Silber, or backing away now and then to take time to think a la Barzun, or a third way that is all yours, please just do it (oops, there's that Nike influence again). There would be nothing worse than to just tread water for the next five years.

PART FOUR: CHAPTER 5

THE CASE FOR BARBER AND BRITTEN

For the past six years I have directed a festival of twenty and twenty-first century music at the University of Arizona. Any festival worthy of the name has a vision or reason for being. The premise of our model, The Music + Festival, is to contextualize the music with a musicological component, and to include added value, in a rich introductory symposium on the music and lives of the composers, and to include another aspect in regard to the music, as in movies—that feature the music of the composers—or dance. We usually present composers in pairs, to diversify the musical palette or to express similarities of a common view. We also usually pair an American composer with a non-American composer.

The first festival presented Crumb and Messiaen, both of whom bring an eclectic, naturalistic, and religio-mystical approach to their music. Both are willing to ride on the edge of kitsch to make their larger philosophical and musical points (sometimes they even get cut). With both there is an attempt to seek or portray the holy or transcendental, and they do this better than most.

The following festival featured Ives and Copland, the two progenitors of American classical music. Ives incorporated all music into his own, including high and low, classical, jazz, and folk, spiritual and symphonic, traditional and experimental. Copland touched on, or created, various aspects of major musical tendencies from the 1920's to the 1970's with his work of three major periods, beginning with proto-serial music, to the Americana style, to his work within the serial lexicon. By presenting the music of both composers, we juxtaposed the music of two composers who worked throughout most of the twentieth century, defined many of its trends, and provided a context for the future development of American classical music.

In 2010-11 we presented John Corigliano and Toru Takemitsu. Corigliano writes in the grand symphonic tradition of Copland, Harris, and Bernstein. Takemitsu is considered the first major Japanese composer who

effectively combined elements of Western and Eastern music and philosophy into his music. As the music of both appeared or was written for film, we partnered with the UA's Hanson Institute for Film to present *Ran* by Kurosawa/Takemitsu, and *The Red Violin* by Girard/Corigliano.

The next festival highlighted the music of Bartok, Ligeti, and Beaser. Bartók, a pianist, composer, and ethnomusicologist. incorporated in his music elements of folk music, created evocations in his "night music," and used exotic scales and new tonal resources, all which were pivotal to developments of more recent music. Ligeti, a Hungarian like Bartok, and a Jew (unlike Bartok), was one of the fathers of the European postwar avant-garde. A survivor of the Holocaust and the postwar disaster of communism, he was a man with a perennially restless mind, who explored electronic music, sound-mass and micro-polyphony, the music of sub-Saharan Africa, minimalism. But the musical results were always distinctive and individual, and on his own terms. After surviving the Nazis and communists he wasn't about to submit to the totalitarian tendencies of other members of the European postwar avant-garde. Beaser, head of the composition department at the Juilliard School, possesses a lyrical gift that is present even in his non-vocal pieces. An important figure among the "New Tonalists," he has established his own language as a synthesis of Western tradition and American vernacular. (As a disclaimer, Beaser and I have been friends and colleagues since our student days at Yale.) Ligeti's and Bartok's compositions were featured in the film portion of the festival. which included Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Shining*.

The fifth iteration presented the work of Igor Stravinsky in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of the premiere of his *Rite of Spring*. I couldn't NOT do this as the score to this work has sat next to my drafting table for thirty-five years (and yes, I do occasionally refer to it). Stravinsky was the major force in music in the first half of the twentieth century and set the agenda for much of the latter half. The festival looked at the output of his entire career: the Russian period, neo-classical (or pan-historical), to the final serial phase. A collaborator of the Dance, we performed numerous works in this genre as well.

This long preamble brings us to this year's festival, which features the music of the American Samuel Barber and the British Benjamin Britten. I chose these composers for their similarities, even while their music is highly distinct from each other. Daniel Felsenfeld, in his simple but not simple-minded book on these two, suggests many similarities as well. Both were among the major forces in music in the first half of the twentieth

Century, certainly in their respective countries. Their music is lyrical, dramatic, and connected to the past. While they both developed and evolved throughout their careers, they always wrote music that was purposefully for an audience, and not infrequently, an occasion. They were decidedly part of their societies, not pushing against established norms, but working within them. They both wrote extensively for the voice with Britten writing some of the most popular operas of our time, and Barber writing some of the most memorable songs in the American literature. They were each experimental in their own way. One need only mention the effect of gamelan and Japanese music on that of Britten towards the end of his life, or the somewhat radical use of percussion in Barber's *Third Essay*.

They are both outliers in musical history as presented in the academy, where the course of development is "polyphony, sonata-allegro form, romanticism, atonality, and eventually the radicalism and hijinks of the twentieth century." I can assure you that this is so, as I never heard their names mentioned in my studies at Hampshire College or Yale. Their music was certainly considered too staid, conservative, anachronistic, and I suspect, beautiful, to be considered worthy of study. They both grew up in decidedly middle-class homes, had pushy and entranced mothers, were scarred by WWII (Britten, a pacifist, "escaped" to America during the war's first years), and lived their lives in relative seclusion. Britten was also a fabulous conductor and Barber a professional quality singer.

They were both gay, and had life-long partners who were also major musicians in their own right—Peter Pears, a tenor, with Britten, and Menotti, a composer, with Barber. Fehlsenfeld devotes a chapter on the question of sexual orientation and its bearing on music, although he actually explores this only in relation to Britten, as regards his alleged interest in young boys and sadism, the latter expressed in his operas. I would agree that this can perhaps explain motivational aspects of the music but certainly not its meaning, as without texts this would be a moot point. Barber is given a pass, as his psyche seems less dark, while he too was prone to self-doubt and depression. But these attributes are pretty widespread I dare say in the compositional community, straight or gay.

For most of their careers Barber and Britten wrote in styles that looked back to, or were simply a part of, the tradition. While this was accepted of Strauss, it was and remains, problematic for our understanding of these composers. It was perhaps a good career move for Strauss to die shortly after the war, while Barber and Britten somehow outlived their time, as their music was sadly "too spikey to appeal to the bulk of listeners, and not

overtly complex enough for the modernists. They wrote beautifully and naturally for the voice, wrote for the greatest performers of their time, with examples being the collaboration of Rostropovich and Britten, and Horowitz premiering Barber's Piano Sonata, or Toscanini's championing of Barber's orchestral music.

So this festival helps in the correction of a historical wrong. Barber and Britten had the sad misfortune of finishing their lives in a time of "cultural tumult" that belittled their accomplishments and dismissed their genius. This festival places them back in the middle of the historical narrative where, because of the sheer beauty and elegance of their music, they so clearly belong.

Part Four: Chapter 6

Final Response on "The Put On of the Century, or the Cage Centenary"

I didn't expect my article on Stravinsky/Cage to create such a firestorm. I have tried to keep up with most of the responses, both positive and negative (the latter designation is a bit of an understatement). Since I can't respond to all of the comments individually, I will respond in more general terms and try to provide a sense of modest closure, if only for the present round.

I would like to first respond to general misgivings some writers seem to have about my knowledge of the field, and thus my right to weigh in on this subject or to even "judge."

As co-music director of the highly regarded New York-based contemporary ensemble Musical Elements, I programmed and conducted works representative of the widest musical aesthetic, from Berio to Lang, Carter to Brown, and Gruber to Feldman. My understanding and knowledge of the repertoire is thus wide and deep. After Musical Elements ceased functioning, I have managed to stay pretty current with the scene. I am a fairly well regarded composer (at least in some circles), having written a pretty extensive catalogue of works, which I will put up against just about any other (Isn't this a necessary attitude of any composer?).

On the matter of Cage, I have read most of his writings, conducted numerous works, studied his scores, and also performed the work of his compatriots and fellow travelers. So my comments are well considered, if a tad polemical. For the record, I happen to enjoy some early works, particularly a few early songs and the "Third Construction in Metal." However, I will continue to maintain that works that rely on his well-known use of chance procedures are not worth the time of any listener, and this includes a large amount of his output.

Some questioned my phrase the "tonal enterprise." In retrospect this should have been defined more clearly. I use this to mean music that has a sense of departure, journey, and arrival or conclusion. It would seem this

broad definition can apply to music based on tonal materials, set-based materials, even serial music. (Is this not why Schoenberg used classical forms?).

I was chided for opening up a conservation that had been apparently "settled" a while ago. In response, let me say that in the Jewish Talmud both majority opinions and minority opinions are represented. This 1,500-year-old text (give or take a few hundred—my apologies for rounding up the 800 years from Leonin/Perotin to 1,000 for argument's sake) is still studied today; so the conversation goes on, the argument and truth-seeking are the important concept and the answer less crucial. Both opinions are registered because it might well be that in the future the minority opinion will be found more useful. Similarly, whereas Cage's music might have had a salutary effect during its time, I don't think this is presently the case. Thus, I will agree with Schoenberg's assessment—Cage was brilliant and inventive, but not a particularly good composer. In my view, perhaps a very small part of his vision should inspire, but most of his music simply can't or, maybe even, shouldn't.

In the final accounting, philosophy, intent, process, talking, writing, all count for very little in the realm of music. The music must ultimately speak and sound for itself. There is obviously pretty strong disagreement as to how Cage's music can, or does, speak to us. I do believe my position on this is clear, reasonable, and worth consideration, and that responses should not include ad hominem, silly, and ignorant attacks, like those that have already been catalogued elsewhere.

Allow me a metaphor borrowed from a well-known composer. Let us assume that the world of music is a very large house with many rooms. Each room contains the mysteries of a composer. Some are larger than others and some are more easily accessed than others. I would put Cage's music at the top of the house, the room would be quite small and entered by only a few, and only after the contents of many other rooms had been savored.

And finally, this entire matter will be answered by Hume's "Test of Time." While composers can't be involved in trying to write masterpieces, they do exist, and God-willing, will continue to be created. Composers must be devoted to beauty and/or truth, and that we know it when we hear those qualities is self-evident. I know of no area of the arts where we don't talk this way. Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis are better than Don Ellis. The Beatles are better than the Dave Clark Five. Picasso is better than Klimt and Roth is better than Mailer. I happen to like them all, but that isn't the point.

We may wish to belittle, deny, evade, deprecate, bury, or run away from the delineation of best/better/bad/awful, in that it involves making judgments of quality. But we must come to grips with this hard reality or our lives and commitment to Music cease to be serious.