
Letters to the Editor

From Richard Derby

I have just read Robert Reilly's article 'The Recovery of Modern Music: George Rochberg in Conversation' in *Tempo* No.219. In interview, Mr Rochberg says that his composition students were once unable to sing the opening tune from Schoenberg's Fourth Quartet from memory. He goes on to say 'The poor kids couldn't remember Schoenberg's tone row! Serialism is the denial of memory. You can't internalize it; you can't vocalize it; it can't live in you.'

I have sung the opening of Schoenberg's Fourth Quartet from memory more than once, in public. Substantial passages from it sometimes 'play' themselves in my head as spontaneous musical expressions. Contrary to Mr Rochberg's assertion, it is possible to sing Schoenberg, to comprehend and remember the mutual relationships of the pitches and intervals, and to hear it for what it is: real music, not an aesthetic archetype.

Perhaps not everyone has the musical ability to appreciate the beauty of Schoenberg's atonal music (just as many may not have the musical ability to appreciate the beauty of Beethoven's, Schubert's, or Brahms's tonal music), but that is their misfortune and not the inevitable recognition of an artistic absolute. Surely we can move our discourse beyond simplistically equating 'atonality' with 'ugliness' and 'tonality' with 'beauty'.

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From Karl Miller

In the introduction to his interview with George Rochberg (*Tempo*, January 2002) Robert R. Reilly writes, 'If it is now safe to return to the concert halls, it is largely because Rochberg's courage helped to free the next generation of composers from the serial straightjacket to write music that was once again comprehensible to audiences.' It is not my intention to diminish the contributions of Mr. Rochberg, for I believe he is one of great creative musicians of our time. However, reading this I wondered to myself, is Mr. Reilly so unaware of the many composers

who never abandoned tonality? Further, is he suggesting that composers like Penderecki, Blackwood, *et al* would never have turned to tonality were it not for Rochberg's creative choices? Mr. Reilly's rhetoric reminds me of the myopic hyperbole of Charles Wuorinen when he wrote, 'But while the tonal system, in an atrophied or vestigial form, is still used today in popular and commercial music, and even occasionally in the works of backward-looking serious composers, it is no longer employed by serious composers of the mainstream. It has been replaced by the 12-tone system' (*Simple Composition*, New York: Longman Press, 1979).

Further, is Mr. Reilly suggesting that 12-tone music is incomprehensible to audiences? I would guess that it might depend upon the listener, for there are those who believe they comprehend 12-tone music. Finally, as to his statement, 'It is now safe to return to the concert halls' Why would it ever be unsafe? If one finds some aspects of modern music a threat to their safety, why worry, for 12-tone music is, relatively speaking, rarely performed. On the other hand, is 12-tone music the problem or is the problem with the expectation of the audience? Reflecting on that notion I am reminded of a quote from Serge Koussevitzky. During a speech he commented on the impact of the mass media on the art of music. 'This spreading of music in the masses, at too rapid a pace, resulted in a profound misconception of music as a means of entertainment and enjoyment to be passively consumed by the listener.' (1947). If an audience feels 'unsafe', I cannot help but wonder if perhaps their expectations are a significant part of the equation.

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From Halli Cauthery

In his substantial article 'The True Relationship' (*Tempo* 219), Mark Doran mentions in passing the thematic and sub-thematic connections in *Verklärte Nacht* proposed by Andrew Porter, and points out merely that he finds 'not all of them convincing'. No doubt he is being charitable – and quite reasonably: Porter's article has its creditable aspects, especially considering its date

(1957) and the anti-Schoenbergian climate in which it was written. Nevertheless, the analytic observations in question (in contrast to Mr Doran's own) are so problematic that it is surely worth discussing them in more detail.

The thematic material which Porter gathers together is found in his Exx.2, 3 and 4 (see p.394 of *Chamber Music*, ed. Alec Robertson):

Ex. 2 *Schr langsam*
pp immer leise

Ex. 3 (a) *Etwas bewegter* (b) *pp*

Ex. 4 *pp*

Immediately, one notices that the fourth note of Ex.3(b) and the corresponding note in the following bar are shown as C natural instead of B flat. This error (uncorrected in the various reprints) then makes its way into Porter's analytic diagram (Ex.6), where the misquoted motif is transposed in order to show its supposed relationship with the other material: see the first of the two staves labelled 'Ex.3(b) trans.', given below:

Ex. 6

Ex. 3 (a)

Ex. 3 (b) trans.

Ex. 2

Ex. 4 trans.

Ex. 3 (b) trans.

As will be seen, with the G erroneously shown as A, Porter must notate the preceding F sharp as a G flat (ouch!) in order to have access to a note on the staff's second line which (if the accidental is then disregarded ...) can be held to relate to the G in his Ex.3(a); had the motif been copied accurately, this enharmonic manipulation would not have been necessary (though there would then have been a left-over F# to deal with!).

In addition, one notes the treatment of the C's and C#'s with which four of the extracts end. Not only are we again expected to ignore accidentals (Ex.3(a) and Ex.4 trans.), but we must allow another inappropriate enharmonic shift in order to obtain a C# from what would correctly be a Db (compare Ex.4 trans. with Ex.4).

And then there is the line deriving from the

original Ex.2. Porter claims that the 'diverse themes' are 'developments from the basic shape of Ex.2' – yet to obtain a seven-note descent down to the desired C he must not only reach forward to the shape as it appears in bb.6-7 (shown in the second section of the original Ex.2, though with the opening semiquaver erroneously doubled in length), but also ignore the uppermost voice of the passage in favour of that which doubles it at the third below!

correctly:

As for the relationship demonstrated between Ex.4 trans. and the second Ex.3(b) trans., one readily admits its reality. On the other hand, given that the two figures are intervallically identical and rhythmically highly similar, the discovery of their relationship hardly qualifies as an act of analysis.

One would not be making a meal of this decades-old example were it not for the fact that such unconvincing attempts have tended to bring

Ex. 3(b)
(corrected)
trans.

Ex. 4
(corrected)

To my knowledge this relationship has not been properly discerned before (compare my diagram with the appropriate parts of Porter's Ex.6 as reproduced by Mr Cauthery); but the existence of the extended contour-relation between the segments x and x' would seem to establish beyond reasonable doubt that Schoenberg's heart and brain were indeed engaged on the kind of operation I have indicated – and that Andrew Porter was at least on the right track.

Donna Marie Rolling-Proctor correctly reminds us of what is certainly a severe shortage, within Hans Keller's work, of non-classical examples of 'reversed and postponed antecedents and consequents'. As part of my own examination of the various elements of Keller's analytic and

theoretical legacy, I have myself found in later music a number of what would seem to be examples of this 'latent' organising principle. As it happens, though, I am strongly of the opinion that until Keller's own work on this topic is more familiar, the bulk of these examples should be kept away from public scrutiny: it would be most unfortunate if any musical or analytic inadequacy on my part were used as a stick with which to beat a thinker whose work still arouses resistance in many musicologists.

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