

a piece of music cannot, however, account for the *meaning* of that piece unless it is placed in a historical continuity. By the same token a "theory" derived from analysis can never legitimately be used as a tool for *producing* music. Attempts to do this betray an idea of musical language based solely on procedures for combining elements, which is, to say the least, irrelevant to any serious discussion of music.

Such a concept of music gives rise to the well-known query which opens many "theoretical" discussions these days: "How did he get the notes?" Shuffling notes with the illusion that one is dealing with the formation of music is like using words like "peace" and "freedom" in speaking about Vietnam without touching the underlying relationships that constitute the real and horrifying meaning of that rotten war.

But, rather than pursue that unhappy metaphor, let me turn to another, this time from linguistics. The choice is logical, with all one hears about "language of music," "musical grammar," and such, and discussions of music always seem to demand an eventual resort to metaphor anyway.

Recently a major breakthrough was witnessed in the field of linguistics. At its head was Noam Chomsky, who pointed out the need to abandon the dead end of taxonomic linguistics, which is based on segmentation and classification of elements. These elements are found by "discovery procedures" which are considered supremely scientific by some because they are applied only to given sequences of sounds without regard to the underlying structure of the language. This is a consequence of the notion that the sequence of sounds represents the structure of the sentence in some direct way.

Chomsky's insight was that one must begin, not with discrete units (in a loose sense, sounds) but with a semantically meaningful deep structure, from which is derived, by a series of operations, the surface structure, which is then assigned a phonetic form. The grammar, then, which describes these steps, shows how the sense of a sentence is related to its words. Chomsky repeatedly asserts that a grammar is a theory of language in that it describes what a person must know in order to speak and understand but that it is *not* a model for the speaker or the hearer; that is, it does not *explain* the language user's ability, nor can it be used to *reduce* language.

The parallels to music here are not accidental. The composer's steps always imply theoretical experience, but he is, so to speak, condemned by the very nature of his responsibilities never to succeed fully in reconciling theory and practice. To use Adorno's terms, "the problem facing the composer is not so much how to organize a musical meaning but rather how to give a meaning to organization."

There is the story of the man who stopped his watch, which had been running slow, so that it would at least give the exact time twice a day. The composer's watch is always too slow or too fast. Still, he falsifies the nature of his work and indicates his responsibilities if he stops the mechanism to assure himself a narrow range of absolute accuracy and security. He is bound, instead, to resist surrendering to the prejudice of The Theory and be prepared to face the multiple character of experience. He must find conceptual schemes open enough to allow

him to select, to process, to combine the many aspects of reality, always bearing in mind that any significant musical idea is not the result of a neo-positivistic procedure but a system of interrelationships in progress.

A theory cannot substitute for meaning and idea; a discrete analytical tool can never be turned to creation by dint of polishing and perfecting it. It is poetics which guide discovery and not procedural attitudes; it is idea and not style.

This basic fact has been missed by those who insist on trying to create a twelve-tone utopia of "twelve-tone coherence" by forcing on us the dubious gift of twelve-tone melodies in which, as someone has written, "the twelve-tone rhythmic structuralization is totally identical (sic) with the structuralization of the twelve tones." Alas, this industrialized twelve-tone horse, dull on the outside and empty inside, constantly being perfected and dragged to a new Troy in shadow of an ideological war long since fought and won by responsible minds like Schoenberg, with neither systems nor scholarship for armor!

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### And Don't Call Them "Lady" Composers

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An artist who works in acoustic, electronic, and mixed performance media, **Pauline Oliveros** (born 1932) resigned from an academic career to be an independent composer/performer. She has received numerous awards, commissions, and grants for her work in composition, performance, music therapy, and criticism. Many of her purely electronic works were produced in the 1960s, when she was co-director of the San Francisco Tape Center and director of the Mills Tape Music Center. Her multimedia works incorporate dramatic narrative, electronic sound sources (both precomposed and improvised), acoustic sound sources, improvisation, film, text, and choreography. An accomplished performer on the piano, accordion, horn, and violin, she often scores her instrumental works for strikingly diverse combinations. She has written many articles on music and has published two books: *Pauline's Proverbs* (1976) and *Software for People: Collected Writings, 1963-80* (1984). In response to an article published in *The New York Times* on the theme "why there are no great women composers," she wrote "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers" (1970), a frank discussion of the professional barriers faced by women composers.

Why have there been no "great" women composers? The question is often asked. The answer is no mystery. In the past, talent, education, ability, interests, motivation were irrelevant because being female was a unique qualification for domestic work and for continual obedience to and dependence upon men.

This is no less true today. Women have been taught to despise activity outside of the domestic realm as unfeminine, just as men have been taught to despise

domestic duties. For men, independence, mobility and creative action are imperative. Society has perpetuated an unnatural atmosphere which encourages distortions such as "girl" used as a bad word by little boys from the age of nine or ten. From infancy, boys are wrapped in blue blankets and continually directed against what is considered feminine activity. What kind of self-image can little girls have, then, with half their peers despising them because they have been discouraged from so-called masculine activity and wrapped in pink blankets?

The distortion continues when puberty arrives and boys turn to girls as sex objects but do not understand how to relate on other important levels. Consider the divorce rate! No matter what her achievements might be, when the time comes, a woman is expected to knuckle under, pay attention to her feminine duties and obediently follow her husband wherever his endeavor or inclination takes him—no matter how detrimental it might be to her own.

A well-known contemporary composer has a wife who is also a competent composer. They travel together extensively and often return to the same places for performances of his work. She is rarely if ever solicited for her own work and no one seems to see anything wrong with constantly ignoring her output while continually seeking out her husband's work.

Many critics and professors cannot refer to women who are also composers without using cute or condescending language. She is a "lady composer." Rightly, this expression is anathema to many self-respecting women composers. It effectively separates women's efforts from the mainstream. According to the *Dictionary of American Slang*, "lady" used in such a context is almost always insulting or sarcastic. What critic today speaks of a "gentleman composer"?

It is still true that unless she is super-excellent, the woman in music will always be subjugated, while men of the same or lesser talent will find places for themselves. It is not enough that a woman chooses to be a composer or conductor or to play instruments formerly played exclusively by men; she cannot escape being squashed in her efforts—if not directly, then by subtle and insidious exclusion by her male counterparts.

And yet some women do break through. The current Schwann Catalog lists over one thousand different composers. Clara Schumann of the Romantic Period and Elizabeth J. de la Guerre of the Baroque are the sole representatives for women composers of the past. But on the positive side, over seventy five percent of those listed are composers of the present and twenty four of these are women. These approximate statistics point to two happy trends: 1) that composers of our time are no longer ignored, and 2) that women could be emerging from musical subjugation. (It is significant that in a biography of Schumann that I have read, Clara is always talked about as a pianist, not a composer, and she is quoted as saying "I'd give my life for Robert.")

The first of the two trends is developing even though the majority of performers do not include contemporary music in their repertoire and private teachers seldom encourage their students to try new music or even to become acquainted

with their local composers. Agencies such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations have helped establish centers for new music in universities across the country, and independent organizations such as the Once Group of Ann Arbor and the San Francisco Tape Music Center promoted lively programs of new music throughout the nineteen sixties. Isolated individual efforts throughout the country have gradually created an active, new music network.

At last, the symphony and opera organizations may have to wake up to the fact that music of our time is necessary to draw audiences from the people under thirty. The mass media, radio, TV and the press could have greater influence in encouraging American music by ending the competition between music of the past and music of the present.

Many composers of today are not interested in the criteria applied by critics to their work and it is up to the critic to discern new criteria by going to the composer. With more performances of new works at which the composers are present, and with the greater mobility of our society, critics have a unique opportunity—a duty—to converse directly with the composer. Then (since performers are often irresponsible with new works because of disrespect for or lack of established models), works with which the critics have familiarized themselves would escape some scathing misjudgments due to poor performances. The ideal critic could not only interpret technically and encourage an atmosphere which is sympathetic to the phenomenon of new music, but present the composer as a real and reasonable person to audiences. Certainly, no "great" composer, especially a woman, has a chance to emerge in a society which believes that all "great" music has been written by those long dead.

The second trend is, of course, dependent on the first because of the cultural deprivation of women in the past. Critics do a great deal of damage by wishing to discover "greatness." It does not matter that not all composers are great composers; it matters that this activity be encouraged among all the population, that we communicate with each other in nondestructive ways. Women composers are very often dismissed as minor or light-weight talents on the basis of one work by critics who have never examined their scores or waited for later developments.

Men do not have to commit sexual suicide in order to encourage their sisters in music. Since they have been on top for so long, they could seek out women and encourage them in all professional fields. Libraries of women's music should be established. Women need to know what they can achieve. Critics can quit being cute and start studying scores.

Near the beginning of this century, Nikola Tesla, electrical engineer and inventor of electrical power from alternating current, predicted that women will some day unleash their enormous creative potential and for a time will excel men in all fields because they have been so long dormant. Certainly the greatest problems of society will never be solved until an egalitarian atmosphere utilizing the total creative energies exists among all men and women.

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