CHAPTER 9

New Tonality I— The New Romanticism

The return to tonality that began with early minimalism held an enormous attraction even in musical circles that did not acknowledge minimalism as a valid style. It was as though serialist atonality were a huge balloon that grew and grew as it filled with water, until minimalism pricked a little hole, precipitating a trickle that turned into a torrent. The response within the classical-academic establishment, however, was not to turn toward simplicity, or process music, or unadorned diatonic consonance. The uptown Manhattan composers reacted as though music history were a single track that had reached a dead end with twelve-tone music, and if one could go no further, the only direction to go was—back. Composers who had surreptitiously written tonal compositions brought their sins out of the closet. Those who had been writing sterile twelve-tone essays with abstract titles returned to writing symphonies, concertos, sonatas, in styles that harked back to Bartók, Mahler (especially Mahler!), Brahms, even Beethoven and Handel. Culture had reached a *cul-de-sac,* and the future was a return to the past, specifically a European past: the New Romanticism.

The most dramatic turnaround was the apostasy of George Rochberg (born 1918 in Paterson, New Jersey), all the more striking because he had been one of the best twelve-tone composers to begin with. His *Serenata d'Estate* (1955), *Sonata-Fantasia* for piano (1956), and Symphony No. 2 (1955–1956) were among the best serialist offerings America had produced. A protégé of the Italian Luigi Dallapiccola, Rochberg had a less doctrinaire, more lyrical approach to twelve-tone writing than practically any American of his generation. In 1964, however, Rochberg's son Paul, a poet, died, and Rochberg underwent a very public change of mind. As he eloquently put it,

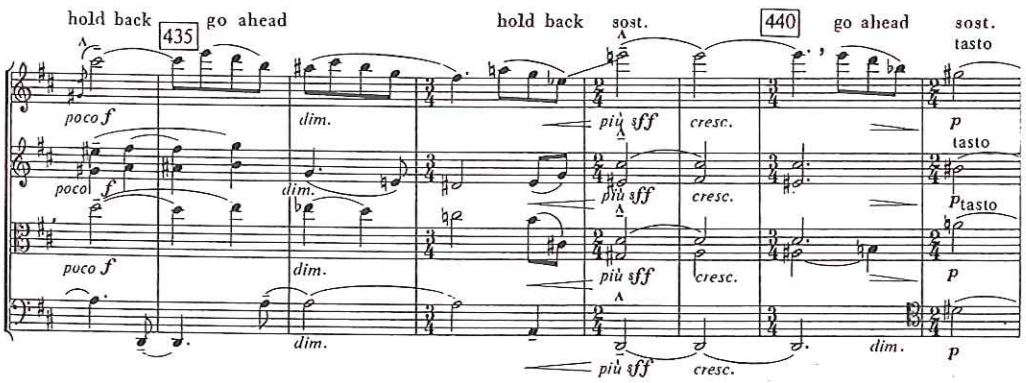
> With the loss of my son I was overwhelmed by the realization that death . . . could only be overcome by life itself; and to me this meant

> through art, by practicing my art as a living thing (in my marrow bone), free of the posturing cant and foolishness abroad these days which want to seal art off from life.[1]

In 1965 Rochberg wrote a work bulging with quotations: *Music for the Magic Theater.* The work cross-cut Mozart's K. 287 Divertimento with blatant phrases from the *Adagio* of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, adding in snippets from Beethoven's Op. 130 Quartet, Webern's Concerto, Varèse's *Deserts,* and Miles Davis's "Stella by Starlight." (All the pieces quoted share a motive of descending half-steps.) The cat was out of the bag. Quotation mania spread throughout the classical music world. Lukas Foss based his *Baroque Variations* (1967) on works of Bach, Scarlatti, and Händel, Jacob Druckman his *Delizie contente che l'alme beate* (1973) on an aria by Cavalli, Joan Tower her *Petroushskates* (1980) on various works of Stravinsky. The fad peaked in 1968 in a masterful European extravaganza, Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia,* in one movement of which the Scherzo of Mahler's Second Symphony becomes a container for a breath-taking game of "name that tune."

Quotation allowed a return to tonality hidden beneath a veneer of irony; it offered a widened emotional palette without sullying the composer's fingers in the actual writing of tonal or pretty music. The next step was to retrace the mental path taken by the great European composers by writing in their styles. This Rochberg did not flinch from, and it earned him more opprobrium than the collages had. He frankly wrote his next body of work, particularly the String Quartets Nos. 3 through 6 (1972–1979; Nos. 4, 5, and 6 called the "Concord Quartets"), heterogeneously in the styles of earlier composers, most notably Beethoven, Händel, and Mahler, though broken up by passages of harsh atonality. (See example 9.1, a Mahler imitation from Rochberg's Quartet No. 3.)

Deserted and reviled by colleagues who accused him of "selling out," Rochberg became the most eloquent spokesman for the bankruptcy of the avant-garde, by which he meant both the twelve-tone serialist movement he had abandoned and the Cagean conceptualist movement



EXAMPLE 9.1 George Rochberg, String Quartet No. 3, fifth movement.

that offered its primary alternative. Composers, he charged, had fallen prey to worship of a superficial view of the scientist and had, unlike the scientists themselves, relinquished intuition and inspiration to chase after physical and quantifiable paradigms. In a simile that has not ceased to be relevant even yet, he compared many composers to the poet in Jorge Luis Borge's story "The Aleph":

> He read me many another stanza, each of which obtained his approbation and profuse commentary, too. There was nothing memorable in any of them. . . . I realized that the poet's labor lay not with the poetry, but with the invention of reasons to make the poetry admirable; naturally, this ulterior and subsequent labor modified the work for him, but not for others.[2]

In a self-searching essay, Rochberg asked,

> Why do you want to write music nobody can love? Do you hate yourself? Or do you hate them? . . .
> Why do you want to write music nobody can remember? Do you hate music?[3]

If not the first to notice, Rochberg was at least the most articulate at pinpointing the strict objectivist mindset that underlay both serialist music and Cagean chance procedures, the common inhibitions that made it taboo to rely, in either movement, on intuition and midcompositional impulse. (The same criticism applied to early minimalism as well, which was just getting under way as he was writing.) A little older than the first generation weaned on Webern, Rochberg argued passionately for a return to subjectivity. And gradually, by the time of his Oboe Concerto (1983) and his Symphony No. 5 (1984), he reintegrated the various threads in his music into a more homogenous, personal style, one that was, ironically, not too dissimilar from that of his early Symphony No. 2.

As Jacob Druckman later remarked, "not being a serialist on the East Coast of the United States in the sixties was like not being a Catholic in Rome in the thirteenth century."[4] Suddenly, however, composers devoutly reared in the religion of dissonant, complex, modernist, twelve-tone music abandoned dissonance, complexity, modernism, twelve-tone technique, or any combination thereof. Some disavowed serialism on grounds of personal expression, some on grounds of audience accessibility, others on more theoretical grounds; as example of the last, Fred Lerdahl wrote persuasive articles about "perceptual constraints," showing that the permutational note arrangements of serialism do not correlate to the way our brains process information.[5] The mass apostasy coincided with efforts to bring composers more into public view, such as Meet the Composer's orchestral residency program. When Druckman became composer-in-residence of the New York Philharmonic (1982–1986), curating the orchestra's "Horizons" series, the first sea-

son—containing works by Rochberg, Schwantner, Rzewski, Adams, Del Tredici, Harbison, Foss, Lerdahl, and others—was advertised with the question "Since 1968: A New Romanticism?" While one could quibble with the date, the new term had gone public in a major way.

An intriguing psychological peculiarity was the tremendous angst with which the classically oriented composers reapproached tonality. The minimalists stripped down to only a few pitches with apparent devil-may-care abandon, but in the academic and Euro-classical music worlds, renouncing the old ways meant overcoming peer pressure, facing the potential wrath of one's colleagues, and risking being regarded as—the worst possible insult—"not serious." There was (and still is) in the modernist mindset a kind of macho disdain for attractive music, a haughty contempt for the lay public, a feeling that one should stand tough against what David Schiff has nonsensically called "the tyranny of the audience."[6] (The pose would seem a little more heroic did not the poseurs so often speak from the comfort of a secure academic environment peopled with like-minded colleagues.) To fly in the face of this arrogance and imagined heroism seemed like admitting intellectual effeminacy, like having to tell your ex-marine father that you're gay. As David Del Tredici said,

> I certainly didn't sit down and decide to become a tonal composer. . . . I fought it all the way. I came of musical age in the 1960s when atonality, whether you happened to like it or not, was widely considered the only viable contemporary musical language. So I had a lot of conditioning to shed.[7]

> The situation gave me kind of a musical nervous breakdown. I thought, "My colleagues will think I'm nuts! I can't be so tonal in 1976. It's crazy. It's not legitimate." On the other hand, I had to look deeper into that part of my personality which had always done the composing, and it was as excited about the tonic and the dominant as it had always been about retrogrades and inversions. So I went with the excitement factor. I really had no choice.[8]

Making changes meant figuring out what was the baby and what the bathwater. Many decided that the problem all along had been an overinsistence on stylistic unity, and that a pluralistic society demanded pluralistic music not held hostage to a Germanic idea of organic form. This attitude, touted as "postmodernism," was summed up by John Corigliano, a composer of multistylistic concertos and coloristic orchestral works: "If I have my own style, I'm not aware of it. . . . I don't think of style as the basic unifying factor in music, as many composers do today[.] I feel very strongly that a composer has a right to do anything he feels is appropriate, and that stylistic consistency is not what makes a piece impressive."[9]

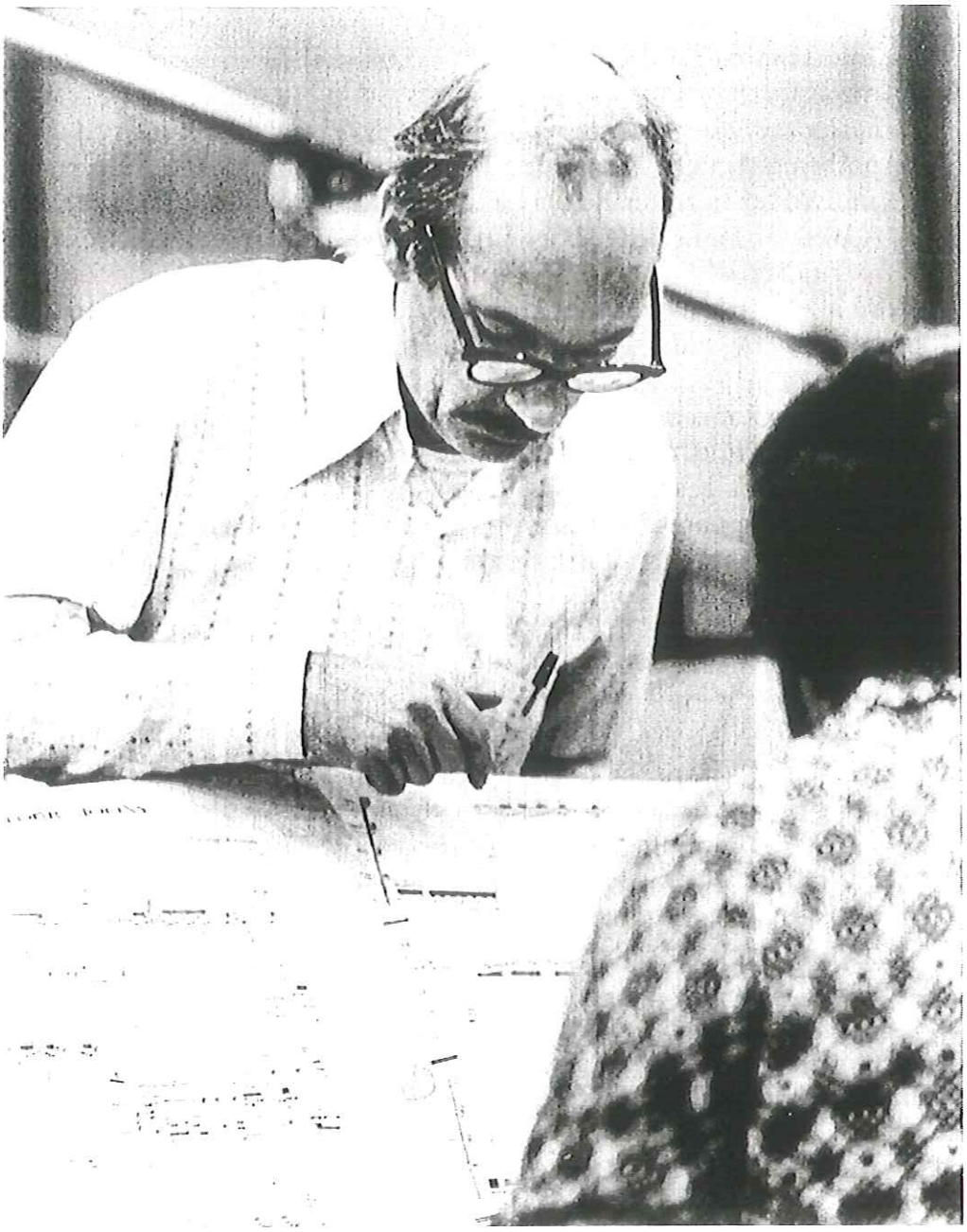
Returning to intuition and personal expression, however, was not easy after such whole-hearted reliance on systems and precompositional method. For Rochberg and many others, it first took the form of a slavish reliance on great works of the classical tradition. Most of the composers involved returned to classical genres such as concerto, song cycle, piano quintet, picking up the remnants of European history and resuming as though they had never been disturbed. William Bolcom took refuge in what earlier (and also younger) composers might have called a failure of imagination: "I find that ensembles call up their own histories, and that in writing a string quartet or music for small orchestra I cannot escape the memory of the great examples of the past."[10] Just as the art rockers and totalists would later incorporate the materials of rock in order to find a foothold in the American music business (see chapters 11 and 13), the New Romantics tried to find a ready-made niche by fitting in with the existing classical establishment.

The apex of nostalgia was reached in John Harbison's *November 19, 1828* (1988), titled for the death-date of Franz Schubert. Written for piano quartet, the piece includes a first movement in which Schubert crosses into the next world; a rondo in which a melodic fragment from an unfinished Schubert work recurs hypnotically; and a final fugue based on a theme from the name S–C–H–U–B–E–R–T (German spellings for E-flat, C, B, B-flat, E). Though this was an extreme example of channeling the spirit of dead great composers, it was hardly atypical. If Rosemary Brown, the Englishwoman who claimed she had channeled music by the spirits of Beethoven and Liszt, had had more political savvy, she could have led a flourishing career in the seventies as a New Romantic composer.

The composers in this chapter, then, are those who see the last hope of American music not so much in a linear continuation of the European tradition (as the serialists did) but in the continued patronage of a classical music establishment that had never warmed up to twelve-tone music anyway. These, consequently, are the composers whom the classical establishment rewards. Most of the winners of the Pulitzer Prizes of the last fifteen years—Christopher Rouse, Bolcom, Ellen Zwilich, Stephen Albert, Harbison, Schwantner—belong in this chapter. (The other winners have veered more toward twelve-tone music.) So do the American recipients of the Grawemeyer Awards (Joan Tower, John Adams) and orchestral residencies. The composers here are the ones who benefit most from the massive in-place resources of our orchestra halls and opera houses.

George Crumb

The return to Romanticism began almost contemporaneously with minimalism, in the dramatic innovations of George Crumb. Crumb is one of



George Crumb. *Courtesy New York Public Library.*

the most curious cases in American music, a comet whose parabolic career rose and fell with the swiftness and curvature of perhaps Edward MacDowell or, even better, Roy Harris. His music of the late 1960s was electrifying, almost as striking for the possibilities it opened up as the earlier work of John Cage. According to one survey, by the mid-1980s Crumb was the most widely performed composer in America. And yet by

this same time his music had already sunk into disrepute among musicians in recognition of its patent self-repetition, its over-reliance on a small repertoire of melodramatic effects ad nauseum. It is clear that Crumb is a very talented musician. However, his success came suddenly and spectacularly, and few could have withstood the pressure to retain one's individuality under the career pressures Crumb faced.

A West Virginia native born in 1929, Crumb studied with Ross Lee Finney and Boris Blacher and taught at the University of Colorado and SUNY at Buffalo before settling in 1965 at the University of Pennsylvania. His early music was in an undistinctive, Bartókian idiom. A request from pianist David Burge led to the first work of Crumb's mature style: *5 Pieces for Piano* of 1962. The piece uses an exploded twelve-tone idiom of great sparseness, Webernesque, yet with already an original sense of gesture, the repeated-note motive being particularly prominent. Compared to music by other twelve-tone composers, the pitch structure is not sophisticated, and Crumb did not continue with dodecaphony for very long. What blew the lid off of the avant-garde piano repertoire, so to speak, was the extent to which Crumb asked Burge to play inside the piano, plucking strings, muting them with paper clips, and damping them with his fingers.

Crumb has shown a lifelong fascination with the poetry of the Spanish poet Frederico García Lorca; in the sixties he took Lorca's poetry as the basis for four books of madrigals (1965–1969), and of *Night Music I* (1963), *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* (1968), *Night of the Four Moons* (1969), and *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970). These pieces, the madrigals especially, continue Crumb's exploration of timbral effects in a delicate style of mysteriously repeated motives and whispered phrases alluding to death. The work that caught the public imagination, though, was *Echoes of Time and the River* (1967) for orchestra, in which Crumb's expanded and theatrical use of instrumentalists was given free rein. The violinists additionally play antique cymbals, string players shout the nonsense syllables "Krek-tu-dai!", a hymn tune ("Were You There When They Crucified the Lord?") appears in harmonics, Crumb's rural background surfaces in the form of a prominent mandolin solo, and at one point the percussionists march across stage chanting the motto of the state of West Virginia: "Montani semper liberi" ("Mountaineers are always free").

In 1970 Crumb followed up with a work perhaps even more astounding: *Black Angels,* the first piece specified for electric (i.e., amplified) string quartet. The list of innovations in this piece staggers the imagination; hardly ever do the players use a conventional string technique. The performers play tremolos on long glissandos marked *pppp* and "gossamer." They chant nonsense syllables like "Ka-to-ko-to-ko" and numbers from one to seven in various languages. They apply great bow

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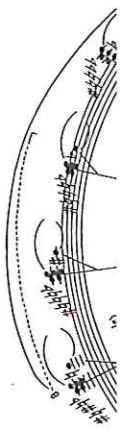
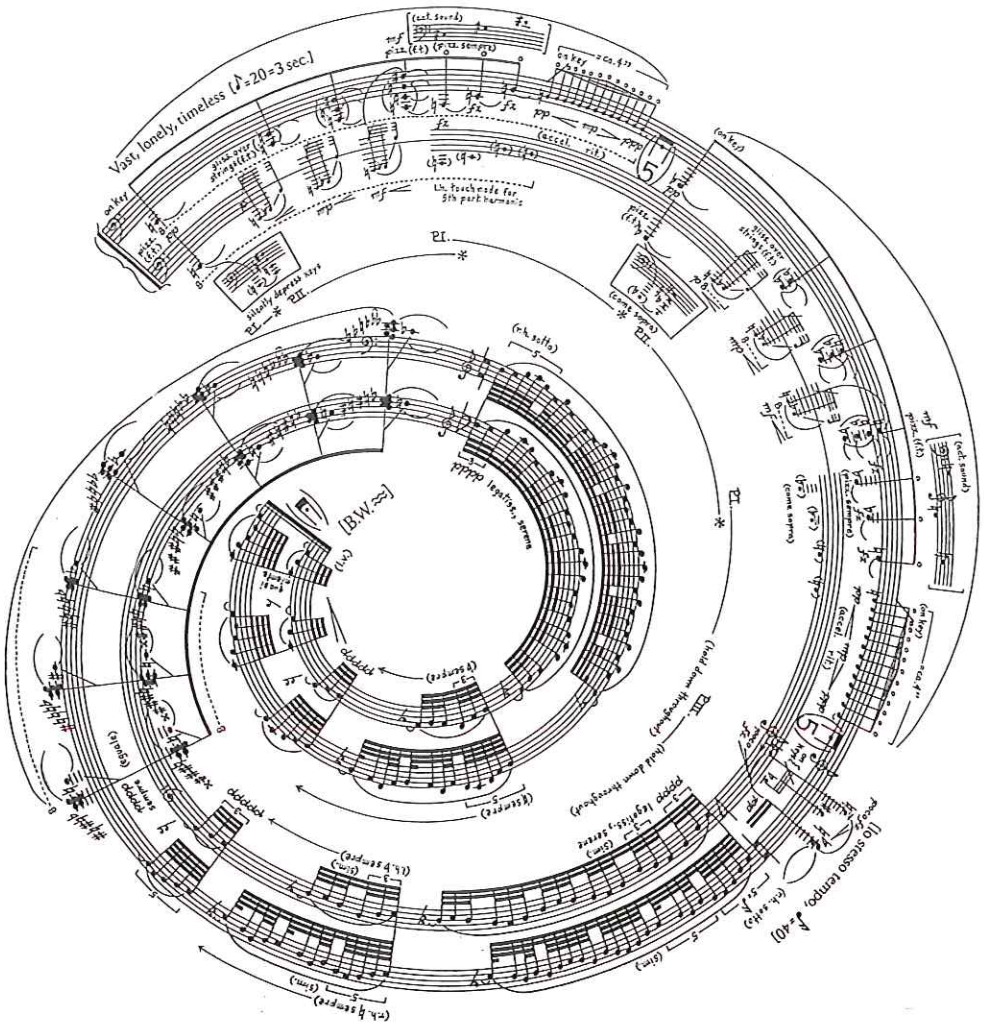


EXAMPLE
Galaxy."

pressure to achieve "pedal tones" below the ranges of their instruments. They hit tam-tams. They bow their strings *above* their left hands, over the fingerboard, holding their violins like viols and fingering backwards. Most dramatically, they play, in movement 10, a chorale on bowed crystal glasses filled with water to create certain pitches. No mere string quartet, *Black Angels* is a theatrical extravaganza that inspired many imitations over the next two decades.

Another powerful aspect of Crumb's work was his inimitable style of notation. His father had worked as a professional copyist, and Crumb, drawing on inherited expertise, notated his scores in picturesque ways that directly reflected the music: combining four staves into one for a quartet playing in unison, placing staves in the shape of a cross, even (as in *Makrokosmos,* Vol. I, example 9.2) curving staves in a spiral to reflect



EXAMPLE 9.2 George Crumb, *Makrokosmos,* Vol. I, movement 12, "Spiral Galaxy."

the extramusical idea behind the music. Even if reading circularly printed music was inconvenient, Crumb made the world of notation seem suddenly wide open.

In his music from 1965 to 1970, from Madrigals, Book I to *Ancient Voices of Children,* Crumb had composed an undeniably evocative body of work. Even in these pieces, however, the drama was a little shallow; the succession of spooky motives led to a patchy continuity, the chanting of numbers and foreign words was meaninglessly portentous, and much of the interest relied on timbres whose novelty did not last long. The obsessions with death, "ancient voices," and a superficial numerology betrayed a sentimentality too thin to support an entire career. By the *Makrokosmos* piano cycles of 1972–1973, based on the zodiac, Crumb's overly idiosyncratic combination of nocturnal imagery, isolated motives floating in space, and bizarre sound effects (some of which required considerable time before and after for execution, breaking up the musical continuity) began to parody itself.

Nevertheless, Crumb's music of the late sixties had tremendous impact, opening composers up to the possibility of new instrumental techniques, the effectiveness of out-of-context quotation, the possibility of having instrumentalists speak and play subsidiary instruments. Even Stockhausen was reportedly influenced by Crumb's piano innovations, and Crumb's works of the late sixties remain crucial and engaging specimens from an exciting era.

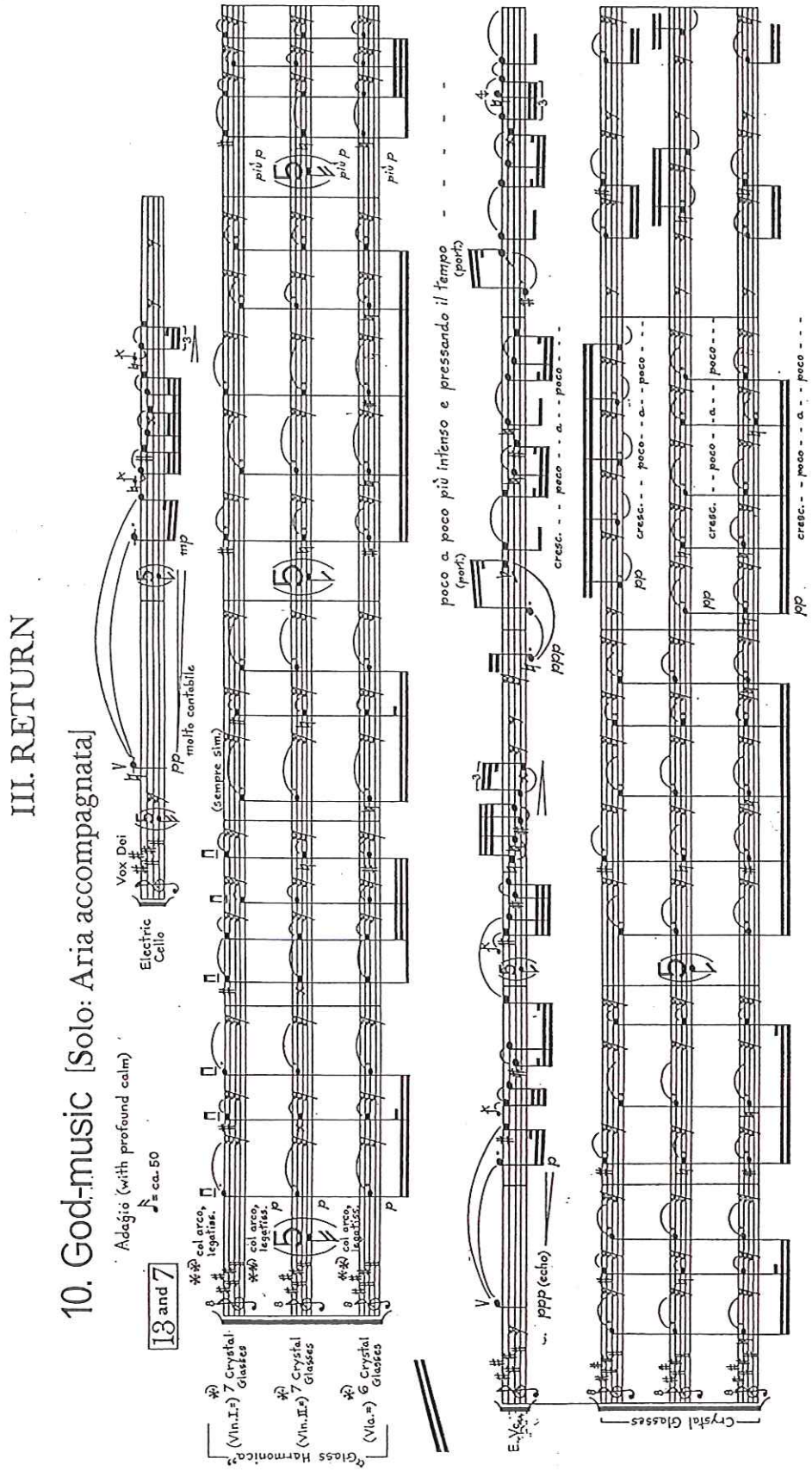
Listening Example: Black Angels *(1970)*

Crumb's large works tend to be fanatical in their symmetry and adherence to numerical patterns. *Black Angels* is a thirteen-movement arch form in which the first movement corresponds numerologically to the thirteenth, the second to the twelfth, the third to the eleventh, and so on, each pair of movements based on some deployment of the number 7, 13, or both. The movements can be characterized as follows:

1. "Threnody I: Night of the Electric Insects": the piece bursts out *fortississimo* with one of the ghastliest effects in music: a buzzy, glissandoing tremolo in all four amplified strings, in highest registers, all *sul ponticello* (bowed close to the bridge) for a thin, noisy tone. Sudden dynamic changes between *ffz* and *pp* come frequently, and a few languid glissandos provide the only melodic element.
2. "Sounds of Bones and Flutes": this brief movement summons up a primitive, spooky energy by having the cello and second violin play glissandos and double stops *col legno* (with the wood) and by having the players click their tongues and enunciate "ka-to-ko to-ko to-ko," and so on.

3. "Lost Bells": a duo for violin II and cello; it begins with a tone on a bowed tam-tam and continues with chords and a short melody in *pianissimo* harmonics.
4. "Devil-music": an athletic first-violin solo is interrupted by the other instruments playing the medieval death hymn "Dies Irae" in "pedal tones"—raspy undertones produced by pressing down hard on the strings.
5. "Danse Macabre": violin II and viola play a dance of demonic tritone double-stops augmented by rapping the instruments with knuckles or fingertips. Violin I and cello enter with the "Dies Irae" pizzicato, accompanied by maracas and ghostly whistling.
6. "Pavana Lachrymae": three of the strings play quotations from the second movement of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet by holding the instruments upright on their knees, like viols, and bowing *above* the left hand. This gives a certain tentativeness to the tuning and timbre.
7. "Threnody II: Black Angels!": this climactic centerpiece is made up of demonic trills, glissandos, and tremolos, often with the players merging into unison. At various points the players shout the Japanese, Russian, and Swahili words for the number thirteen, and they end by counting to seven in German.
8. "Sarabanda de la Muerte Oscura": again holding the instruments like viols and bowing above the left hand, the players quote an old saraband.
9. "Lost Bells (Echo)": little more than a few pizzicato harmonics, the rattle of a maraca, and the numbers one through seven in French.
10. "God-music": The most famous (and indeed beautiful) section, this is where three of the players bow a kind of chorale on glasses filled with water and tuned to specific pitches. Violin I, with an ethereal, Messiaen-like melody, appears as the "Vox Dei," the voice of God. Note (in example 9.3) how the top melody of the chorale switches from instrument to instrument.
11. "Ancient Voices": each violinist gets eerie sounds by playing tremolos with a glass rod and metal plectrum (paper clip).
12. "Ancient Voices (Echo)": a few glissandos played with the instruments held mandolin-style.
13. "Threnody III: Night of the Electric Insects": at first this finale returns to textures of the first movement. It then restates the saraband of movement 8, but now in tremolos played with thimble-capped fingers.

In retrospect the content of *Black Angels* can seem a little thin, its insistence on weird timbres and on extremes of dissonance mannered. But in 1970, no one had ever heard anything like it, and it still retains some of the freshness of that feeling.



EXAMPLE 9.3 George Crumb, *Black Angels*, movement 10.

John Adams

John Adams made his early career as the "fifth minimalist" (after Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass), with works such as *Shaker Loops* and *Phrygian Gates*. In the eighties, however, he bounded away from minimalism in large leaps; traces of repetition remain in *Grand Pianola Music* and his bold first opera *Nixon in China,* but by his second opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* he found himself in a world that retained little in common with the music of Reich and Glass. Adams's philosophy, too, is more concerned with postmodernism and a new approach to history than with the hidden structure and smooth language of the postminimalists. "I embrace the whole musical past," he has said.[11] By existing, though, at the crossroads of two movements, combining minimalism's clarity with the New Romanticism's grand emotional expression, Adams has become one of the most popular of recent composers.

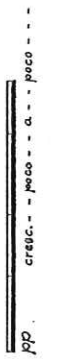
Adams was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1947, and grew up in New Hampshire. Immersed in rock and jazz, he received a scholarship to Harvard but found the university stifling, as so many other young composers would over the coming decades:

> I was interested in jazz and rock, and then I would go into the music department, which was like a mausoleum where we would sit and count tone-rows in Webern. It was a dreadful time. But then we were all going back to our rooms and getting high and listening to Cecil Taylor and John Coltrane and the Rolling Stones. . . . Right from 1967 I knew I was leading a double life—and that it was dishonest.[12]

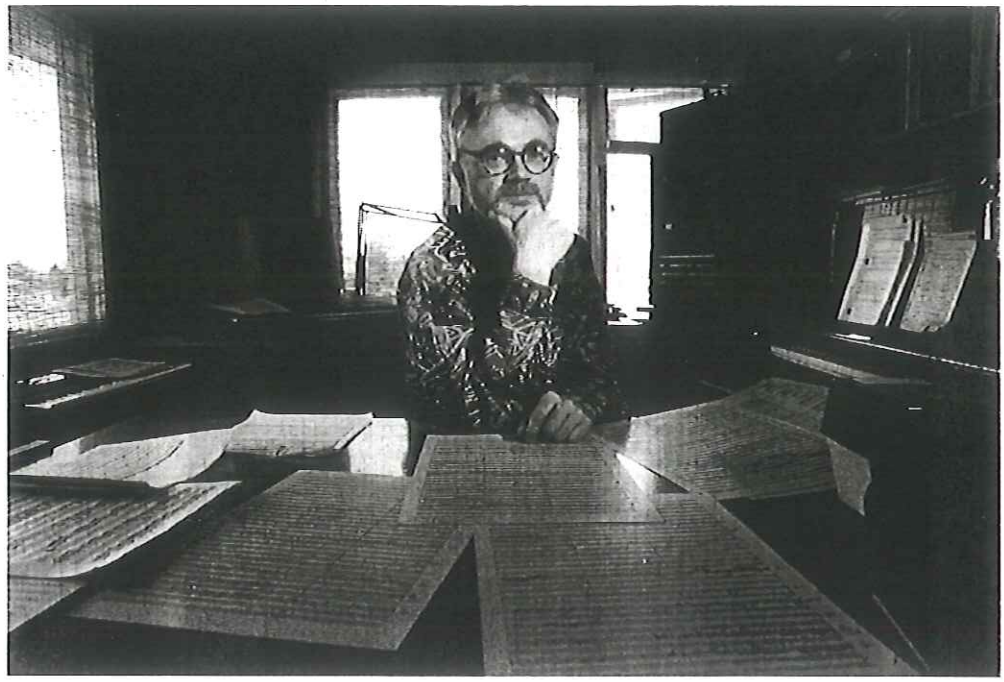
With perspicacity shown by few parents in the history of music, Adams's parents gave him a copy of John Cage's *Silence* for graduation; the book provided him with a new and much-needed perspective.

In the summer of 1971 Adams headed for the San Francisco area, where he has lived ever since, and got a job at the San Francisco Conservatory, where he taught until 1982. He had already heard the recording of *In C* at Harvard, and he converted to minimalism when Reich performed *Drumming* in San Francisco in 1974; the style, Adams said, was "a bucket of fresh spring water splashed on the grim and rigid visage of serious music."[13] With the appearance of Adams's first two major works, *Phrygian Gates* (1977–1978) for piano and *Shaker Loops* (1978) for string septet, the world seemed to have gained another minimalist: one interested in minimalism as textural springboard, not—as with Riley, Reich, and Glass—as audible process or linear progression. *Phrygian Gates* starts with a steady eighth-note momentum with lots of minimalist-type patterns, but the piece follows no strict process. It moves from texture to texture gradually, but with whimsical unpredictability.

Adams's next major work, *Harmonium* (1981), for chorus and orchestra, sets poems by John Donne and Emily Dickinson in a texture



EXAMPLE 9.3 George Crumb, *Black Angels*, movement 10.



John Adams. *Photo by Richard Morganstern.*

of minimalist repeated notes, but with grand brass flourishes reminiscent of nineteenth-century music. *Grand Pianola Music* (1981–1982), for two pianos and ensemble, uses repeated patterns to build up to a jocose theme of Beethovenian grandiosity. By *Harmonielehre* for orchestra (1985), named after a theory treatise by Schoenberg, the break with minimalism seems complete: the themes bounce with repeated notes, the textures swim in ostinatos, but otherwise the music's tempestuous emotional sweep seems more related to Mahler and Sibelius than Glass or Reich. For Adams after 1984, repeated scales and arpeggios are simply features of a basically neoromantic style.

In 1983 Adams was approached by opera director Peter Sellars, who had created scandals by his settings of Mozart operas in contemporary dress and atmospheres, about an opera about Nixon and Mao Tse-Tung. Adams resisted at first, but soon realized the mythic proportions of the story. Sellars chose his old Harvard classmate Alice Goodman as librettist, and she wrote the entire piece in a charming rush of rhyming couplets. The result, commissioned by the Houston opera, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Kennedy Center, was the most widely-awaited opera in American history: *Nixon in China* (1987). With singers who eerily resembled Nixon and Kissinger, the visual aspect of the opera was well-nigh perfect, looking as much like actual film footage as an opera could.

Nixon in China opens with rising scales leading to a haunting peasant's chorus: "The people are the heroes now / Behemoth pulls the peas-

ant's plow." A plane lands onstage, Nixon and his wife Pat emerge, and when Nixon in his excitement stutters, "News, news, news, news, news, news, news, has a, has a, has a, has a kind of mystery," the repeated notes Adams inherited from minimalism seem in tune with the emotions of the moment. The rest of the opera portrays a Nixon at first full of confidence, but in meeting with Mao and Chou En-Lai, finding himself immersed in cultural forces beyond his comprehension. In the closing scene, Nixon, Pat, Madame Mao, and Chou sit on beds and soliloquize about the paths that brought them to this meeting. Nixon reminisces about his World War II experiences, while Chou, more reflective, ends:

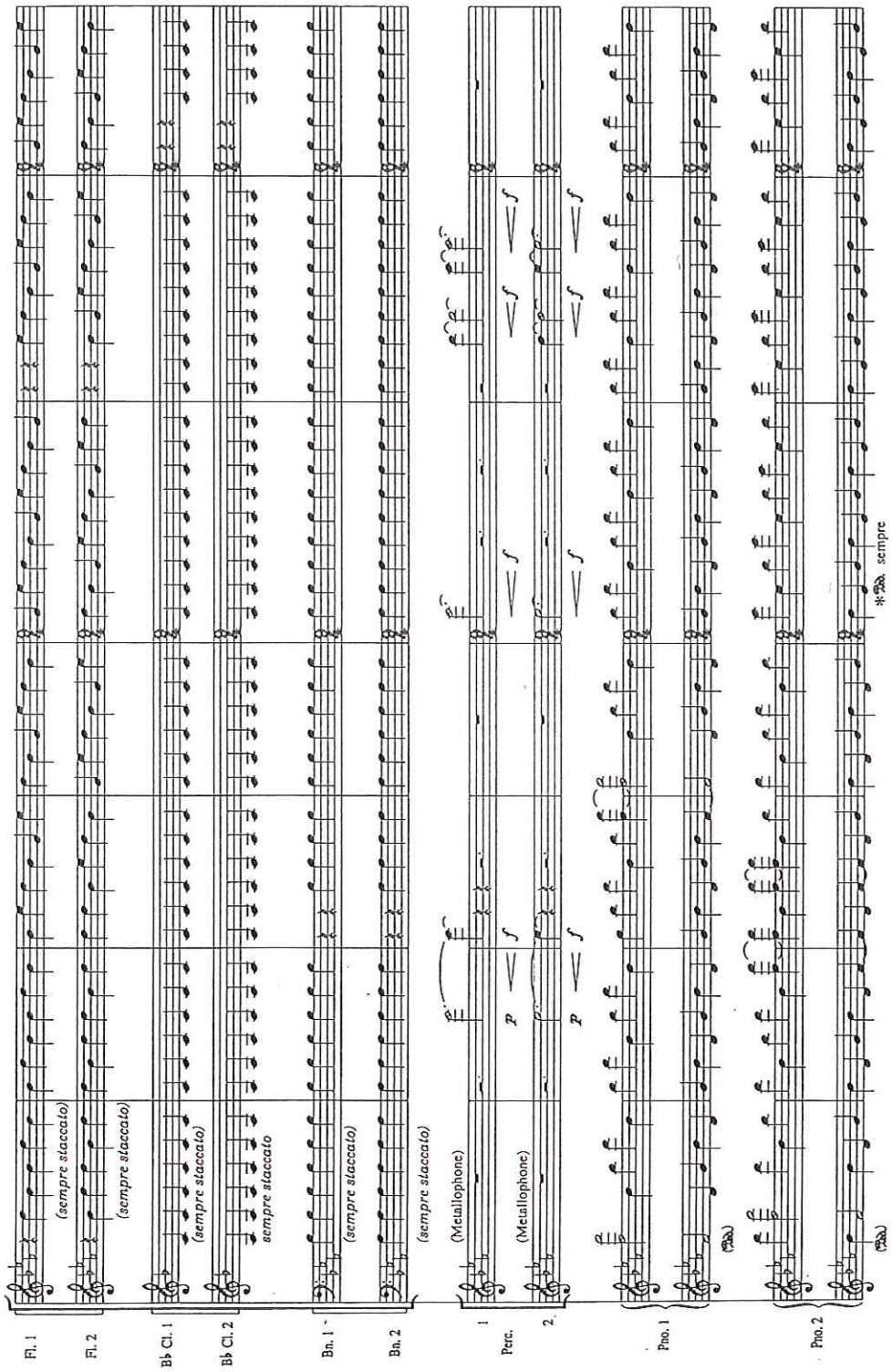
> How much of what we did was good?
> Everything seems to move beyond
> Our remedy. Come, heal this wound.
> At this hour nothing can be done.
> . . . To work!
> Outside this room the chill of grace
> Lies heavy on the morning grass.

The moment is one of the finest in American opera.

Adams based his second opera on another contemporary event, the hijacking of the ship Achille Lauro by Arab terrorists and the killing of an elderly Jewish man named Klinghoffer in 1985. Somewhat unfortunately, its title *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) threw the opera's weight on a hapless, essentially anonymous victim, not a character capable of bearing the weight of grand opera. Adams has noted opposing veins in his work: "dark, intrsopective, 'serious'" works like *Harmonielehre* on one side, and on the other "the Trickster, the garish, ironic wild card."[14] The Trickster pieces, such as *Fearful Symmetry* (1988), retain the repeated motives of minimalism; some of these, such as *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986) and *The Chairman Dances* (from *Nixon*) are quite jaunty and have become popular orchestral showpieces. The introspective works, like *The Wound-Dresser* (1988, based on Whitman), are in a thoroughly Romantic vein.

Listening Example: Grand Pianola Music *(1981)*

Grand Pianola Music is one of Adams's best Trickster pieces, a fascinating hybrid work that starts off from minimalist principles and moves into a grandly Romantic statement. The work is scored for peculiar forces: winds in pairs, three percussionists, three amplified women's voices, and two solo pianos. It takes its distinctive shimmering quality from a device that Adams transposed from the world of tape delays: the two pianos, and sometimes the pairs of winds as well, often play the same lines a sixteenth- or eighth-note apart, so that one is quickly echoing the other. (See example 9.4.) The work is in three movements, the first two joined to form Part I, the final one entitled "Part II: On the Dominant Divide."



EXAMPLE 9.4 John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*, mm. 106–112.

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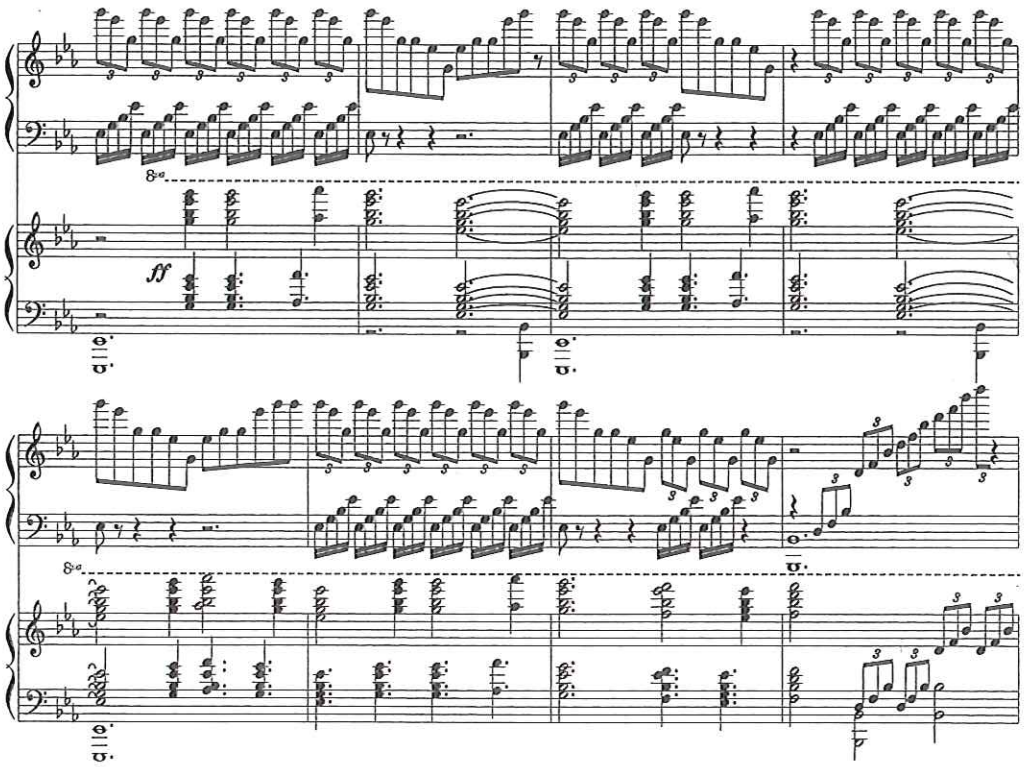
Grand Pianola Music opens sounding minimalist indeed: the winds and pianos play only quarter-notes on the pitches E-flat, F, A-flat, and B-flat. After about three minutes, the tonality begins quietly wandering as the woodwinds take over in long-ranged melodies. The three female voices enter singing triads in a lovely E-minor passage that eventually precipitates the end of the opening seven-minute crescendo, where the pianos suddenly plunge into heroic arpeggios on a B-flat-major triad. The following climax employs one of minimalism's favorite chord changes, ubiquitous in Glass's music: the chord shifts from B minor to B-flat major, the D held over as the third in both chords. (This same relationship, between E minor and E-flat major, returns at the final buildup of the third movement.) The remainder of the movement shifts subtly from key to key, and among winds, voices, and pianos, in quiet repeated notes.

After the repeated notes stop, the slow movement begins. In tonalities and melodic contours reminiscent of Copland's *Appalachian Spring,* an oboe solo leads us to a few loud, poignant chords. From here piano 2 begins a quiet melody—a single line at first, then in octaves, finally joined by piano 1 and a solo tuba in delicate counterpoint. The piano melody turns to sixteenth-note arpeggios up and down the keyboard, and here more than anywhere else is it audible that piano 2 is echoing piano 1's notes only a sixteenth-note later. The movement ends after a lovely decrescendo.

Intentionally or not, "On the Dominant Divide" suggests that we are about to leave minimalist principles behind and embark on a new Romantic course hinted at in the first movement's climax. Adams wrote this movement, he said, to see what would happen applying minimalist strategies to common tonic and dominant chords, a chord combination that minimalism had assiduously avoided. The movement begins with a long dominant preparation crescendoing and finally resolving to a grand A-flat major triad that turns out to be the subdominant of E-flat. At last the Beethovenian main theme (example 9.5) enters in piano 2, spreads to piano 1 and then the brass in a grand climax. The theme then dissipates, abstracted into only its harmonies, as the pianos and winds play minimalist arpeggios in C major. From here on out the work is a continuous crescendo, cadencing at last in triumphant A-flat major. The work is remarkable not only for its exquisite balance between minimalist logic and Romantic gesture, but for its masterful handling of large tonal areas.

EXAMPLE 9.4 John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music,* mm. 106–112.



EXAMPLE 9.5 John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music,* main theme of Part II.

Frederick Rzewski

Frankly, Frederic Rzewski does not fit in this chapter, nor could a figure so Protean fit comfortably in any general classification. His first appearance on the public stage was as a card-carrying minimalist, yet one with a political bent, in the still-popular works *Attica, Coming Together,* and *Les Moutons de Panurge.* Only four years later, however, he wrote a massive set of piano variations, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!,* whose rigor owed more to serialist thinking and a wealth of classical techniques than to minimalism. His inclusion here, then, should not be taken as associating him with the New Romantic movement, with which he has more differences than similarities. One could say, though, that as a phenomenal pianist-composer working in European-derived forms such as variations and with large orchestral and choral forces, that Rzewski (pronounced Zhev-ski) is the closest thing we currently have to a nineteenth-century Romantic-style figure. It is not so much his music that seems Romantic as the volcanic thrust of his career.

Born in 1938 in Massachusetts, Rzewski began composing at five. He studied at Harvard with Walter Piston and Randall Thompson (the latter, 1899–1984, a composer of lyrical choral works and symphonies) and at Princeton with Sessions and Babbitt. Two years in Italy on a

Fulbright fellowship (1960–1962) brought him into Luigi Dallapiccola's orbit, and he became well known in Europe as a masterful performer of works by Boulez, Stockhausen, Cage, Kagel, Feldman, and others. Rzewski's playing is extraordinary for its violent energy and absolute command of the keyboard. In Rome in 1966 he founded a pioneering live electronics improvisational ensemble, Musica Elettronica Viva, with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum. MEV (as it is often called) was most active from 1967 to 1970, but the group still reunites for special performances.

Rzewski first came to major attention as a composer with three works securely in the minimalist tradition, all based on additive processes. The first, *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1968) is a sixty-five-note melody to be played in (attempted) unison by any ensemble. Each person is supposed to play the first note, then the first two, then the first three, and so on, until the entire melody is played, after which notes are subtracted from the beginning. Mistakes are inevitable, and once the players have gotten off, they are to remain off, as the different lines echo each other at gradually increasing distances. The other two works, often paired in performance, mark the beginning of Rzewski's involvement with political music: *Coming Together* and *Attica* (both 1972). Both of these are diatonically tonal, one angry and in a minor key, the other tranquil and major, and each uses a spoken text by a political prisoner involved in the uprising at Attica prison.

Rzewski's flirtation with minimalism, however, was short-lived. His more loyal ties were to a growing group of political composers that included Christian Wolff on the East Coast, Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra in England, and Frank Abbinanti in Chicago. The minimalist idiom raised for Rzewski questions about musical language, and as he put it, "It seemed to me there was no reason why the most difficult and complex formal structures could not be expressed in a form which could be understood by a wide variety of listeners."[15] He attempted to prove this assertion in his next work and still his best known: *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1975), a mammoth set of variations on a Chilean revolutionary song by Sergio Ortega. In thirty-six variations exploring a dazzling universe of different pianistic techniques, the piece holds a deserved place next to Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* or Brahms's *Händel Variations*. Whether it achieves its ostensive extramusical aim—to make a political point in favor of Chile's revolutionary movement—has often been the subject of heated debate.

The idiom Rzewski created in *The People United* is one he calls "humanist realism," defining it as

> A conscious employment of techniques which are designed to establish communication, rather than to alienate an audience. That does not necessarily mean an exclusion of what's called avant-garde style,

> by any means. [But] . . . if one is seriously interested in communication, then I suppose that a rigorous, say, formalistic style such as the style of the formalist composers and so on would be at a serious disadvantage.[16]

In 1977 Rzewski was invited by the French composer Henri Pousseur to join the faculty of the Conservatory of Liege. Graced with a new level of financial security, he began writing larger works, such as *A Long Time Man,* for piano and orchestra (1979), and *The Silence of Infinite Spaces* (1980). The latter is a cosmological meditation on a text by Pascal, for singers with orchestra divided into seven parts to portray the seven planets known at the time. However, it remains for his piano music that Rzewski is best known, partly because his interpretive skills are so compelling. After *The People United* he wrote *Four North American Ballads* (1978–1979) based on political folk songs, each mercurial and whimsical in inspiration, ranging from minimalist simplicity to thundering contrapuntal complexity.

Rzewski's most compelling recent work is probably his *De Profundis* (1991) for pianist, a moving and highly emotional setting of excerpts from the long letter Oscar Wilde wrote while incarcerated in Reading Jail. The text itself is stunning in its fearless examination of the human soul:

> People point to Reading Gaol, and say, "That is where the artistic life leads a man." Well, it might lead to worse places. Mechanical people to whom life is a shrewd speculation depending on calculation always know where they are going, and go there. They start with the ideal desire of being the parish beadle, and they succeed in being the parish beadle and no more. A man whose desire is to be something separate from himself succeeds in being what he wants to be. That is his punishment. Those who want a mask have to wear it. But . . . [p]eople who desire self-realization never know where they are going. They can't know. To recognize that the soul of a man is unknowable, is the ultimate achievement of wisdom. The final mystery is oneself.[17]

The setting requires the pianist, while playing and speaking the text, to make vocal noises, whistle, hit the outside of the piano, honk a bicycle horn, and slap his face and body. Such actions serve a profound dramatic purpose in context. Rzewski is one of the most relentlessly honest and musically sophisticated composers America has produced, regardless of category.

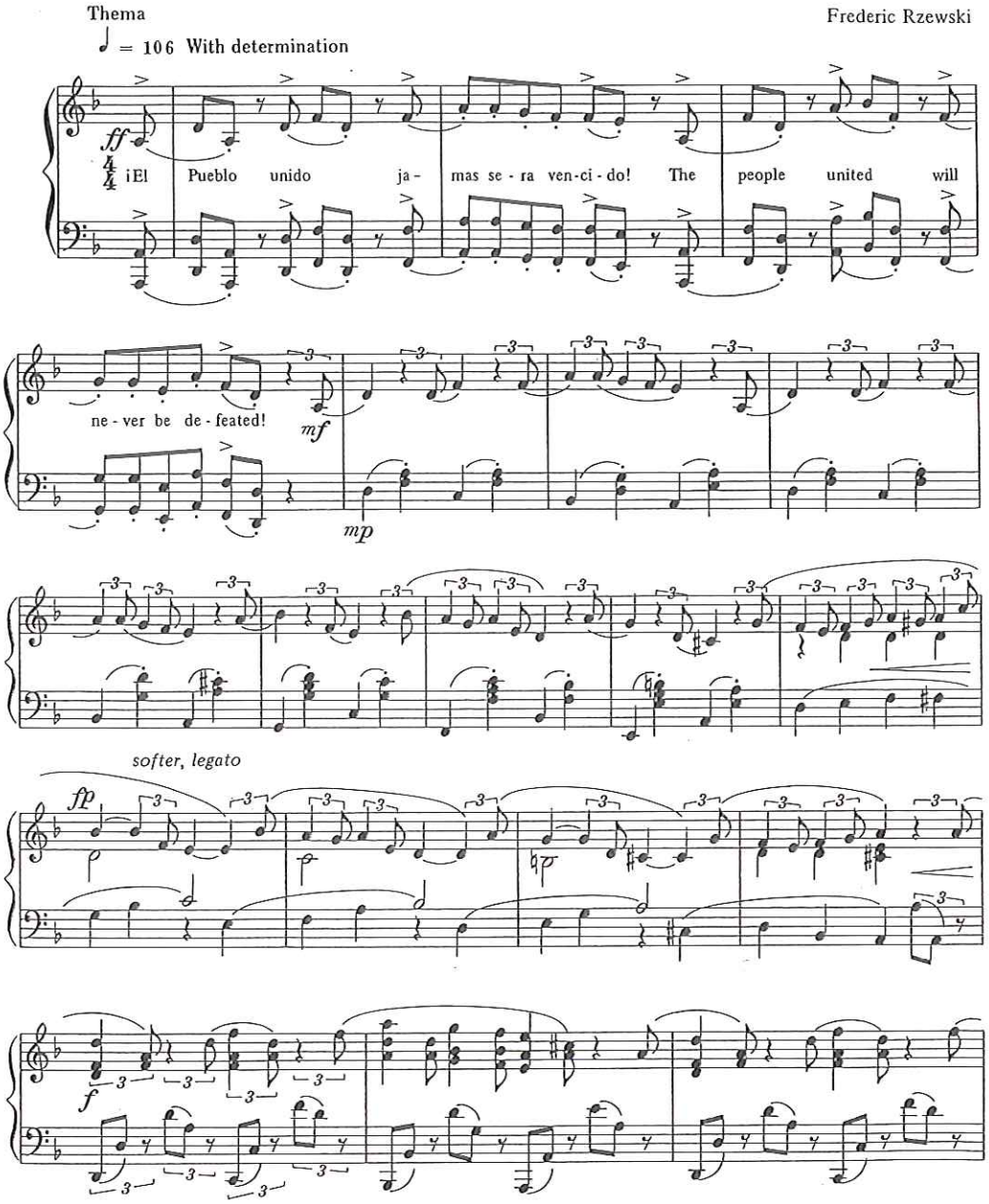
Listening Example:* The People United Will Never Be Defeated!** ***(1975)

Rzewski's *The People United* is one of the great works of the American piano literature, and probably the most popular piano work the 1970s

produced, with competition only from John Adams's *Phrygian Gates*. This is despite, if not because of, a complexly intellectual structure and a range of styles that encompasses jazz, modal quasi-improvisation, serialist fragmentation, minimalist patterns, Romantic climaxes, and Ivesian texture-layering. If this gives the impression that Rzewski is a postmodernist working in a collage idiom, the piece itself does not strike the listener that way. It does, however, express a stream-of-consciousness freedom that transcends its intricate formal plan.

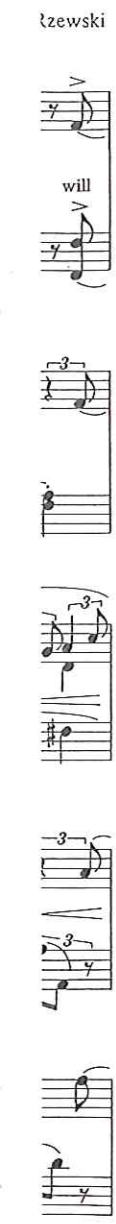
There are thirty-six measures in the theme of *The People United,* and Rzewski writes thirty-six variations. These are divided in six sets of six variations each. Within each set, the sixth sums up the previous five in four-measure groupings. That is, within variation 6, the first four measures refer to variation 1, the next four to variation 2, the next four to variation 3, the next four to variation 4, and the next four to variation 5; the last four present new material. This pattern is repeated for variations 7 through 12, 13 through 18, 19 through 24, and 25 through 30. The final set, variations 31 through 36, is an even more remarkable tour de force: variation 31 sums up the first variations of each earlier set (nos. 1, 7, 13, 19, and 25), variation 32 sums up the second of each set (nos. 2, 8, 14, 20, and 26), and so on. This daunting plan is carried out with tremendous freedom and imagination and virtually no literal quotation. A few landmarks to the hour-long structure are given here:

- The theme (example 9.6) states the folk song in spare octaves, then relaxes into a dark, almost bluesy setting.
- Variation 1 breaks the theme into single notes, dispersed throughout the range of the keyboard in a quasi-serialist manner.
- Variation 5, marked "Dreamlike, frozen," takes its impulse from staccato chords to be played in "a swift, sudden grabbing motion . . . like picking berries, or fruit." The sustain pedal is pressed *after* each chord to capture some resonance.
- Variation 10 features wild glissandos up and down the keyboard.
- Variation 11, breaking down the theme into an isolated beat here and there, asks for optional sound effects such as slamming the piano lid, a short vocal cry, and whistling; this is a common feature of Rzewski's piano writing that he shares with John Cage and Christian Wolff.
- Variation 13 returns simply to the theme with a jazz feel, quick flurries of notes in the right hand over walking chords in the left. At the end, the music pauses for a *pianississimo* quotation in the treble of the Italian socialist song "Bandiera Rossa."



EXAMPLE 9.6 Frederic Rzewski, *The People United*, theme.

- Variation 20 states the theme over a virtuosically repeated D.
- Variation 24, recapitulating nos. 19 through 23, climaxes on a both-hands tremolo on a high B, lasting fifteen to twenty seconds.
- Variation 27 departs from the overall scheme, starting with a free modal melody in the right hand over a drone on E and B. The long digression that follows is the most minimalist-



sounding part of the piece, with modal melodies articulating charmingly irregular rhythmic patterns of alternating 5/8, 9/8, and 8/8 meter. A final section in 22/8 meter (6+5+6+5) over running eighth-notes in the bass suggests process pieces like Philip Glass's *Music in Fifths*.

- Variation 28 returns us to reality with a march-like momentum but subsides into a gentle rippling between the two hands.
- Variation 36, just before the restatement of the theme, pauses after a series of *pianissimo* perfect-fourth intervals for an optional improvisation which the pianist may extend for up to five minutes.

Like Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" and Op. 111 Sonatas, *The People United* has become one of the piano works pianists venture as a way of proving their mastery in the most technically and emotionally challenging large forms. In it, Rzewski proved that music could be complex in structure and still win over enthusiastic audiences time and again.

Jacob Druckman

Despite his public connection to the New Romanticism, Jacob Druckman retained the closest ties to serialism of any composer in this chapter. Though he renounced the twelve-tone row, he never renounced modernism. His music rarely refers to conventions of earlier European music except through quotation. More essentially, Druckman has a reputation as an extremely fluid orchestral colorist. Many others have tended in the same direction, but no other American's music is so abstract, yet so light and incorporeal, so delicate and evanescent in its interplay of vanishing timbres. One of his favorites among his own works, *Aureole,* he likened to a Fourth of July sparkler shooting off sparks as it is swung through the air;[18] the simile is relevant to much of his music. Druckman (along with Gunther Schuller, Joseph Schwantner, Mario Davidovsky, and others) was also one of new music's most visible power brokers, an enormously influential presence on grant and award panels.

Druckman was born in 1928 in Philadelphia and grew up as a violinist and jazz trumpeter. He studied with Copland at Tanglewood and with Persichetti and Mennin at Juilliard, where he would later teach from 1957 on. Consequently, he started out as something of a neoclassicist. In *Dark Upon the Harp* (1962), for mezzosoprano, brass, and percussion, Druckman began breaking out of the neoclassic mold, moving toward serialism and using elements of big-band jazz in the final movement. A brief involvement with serialism peaked in his Second String Quartet of 1966.

Druckman was drawn away from the common serialist wisdom of his day by his experiences in 1965–1968 at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. He later said,

> Electronic music is a great debunker of the vanities that composers hold. Intellectual ideas crumble in the face of listening to the actualities of electronic music. . . . [I]f you listen very honestly to what comes out of the machines, you'll find that very often it has very little to do with what you thought you were putting into it.[19]

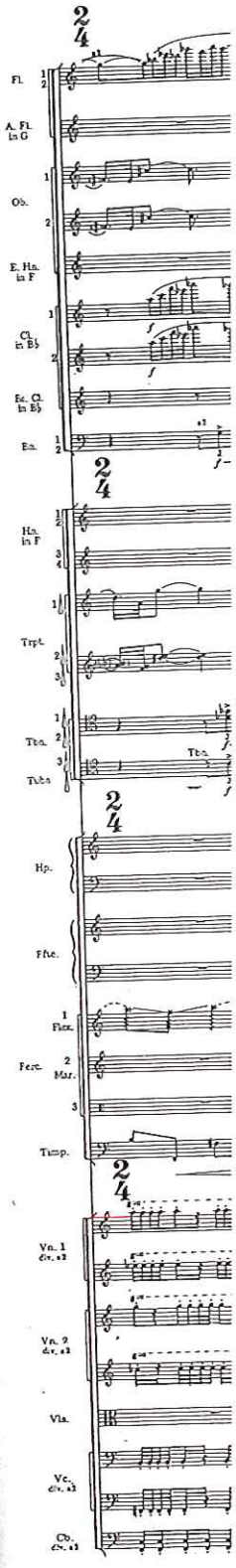
At the same time, since Druckman was repelled by the idea of listening to loudspeakers (his only pure electronic work is *Synapse* of 1971), his electronic works moved into the direction of theater. His *Animus* series for instruments or voice and tape accentuates the theatrical relationship of performers to instruments and their surrounding sound environment.

The electronic, experimental phase of Druckman's career diminshed in importance through the seventies. His mature style set in with *Windows* (1971) for orchestra, which experimented with proportional notation (he called it analogue notation), leaving the timing of certain entrances to be left to the conductor or individual player. From this point on, the aesthetic of Druckman's orchestral works—*Chiaroscuro* (1977), *Prism* (1980), *Nor Spell Nor Charm* (1990)—remains consistent: atmospheric, coloristic, highly detailed in orchestration, with wispy effects such as glissandos, tremolos, harmonics, and percussion gestures that decrescendo rapidly.

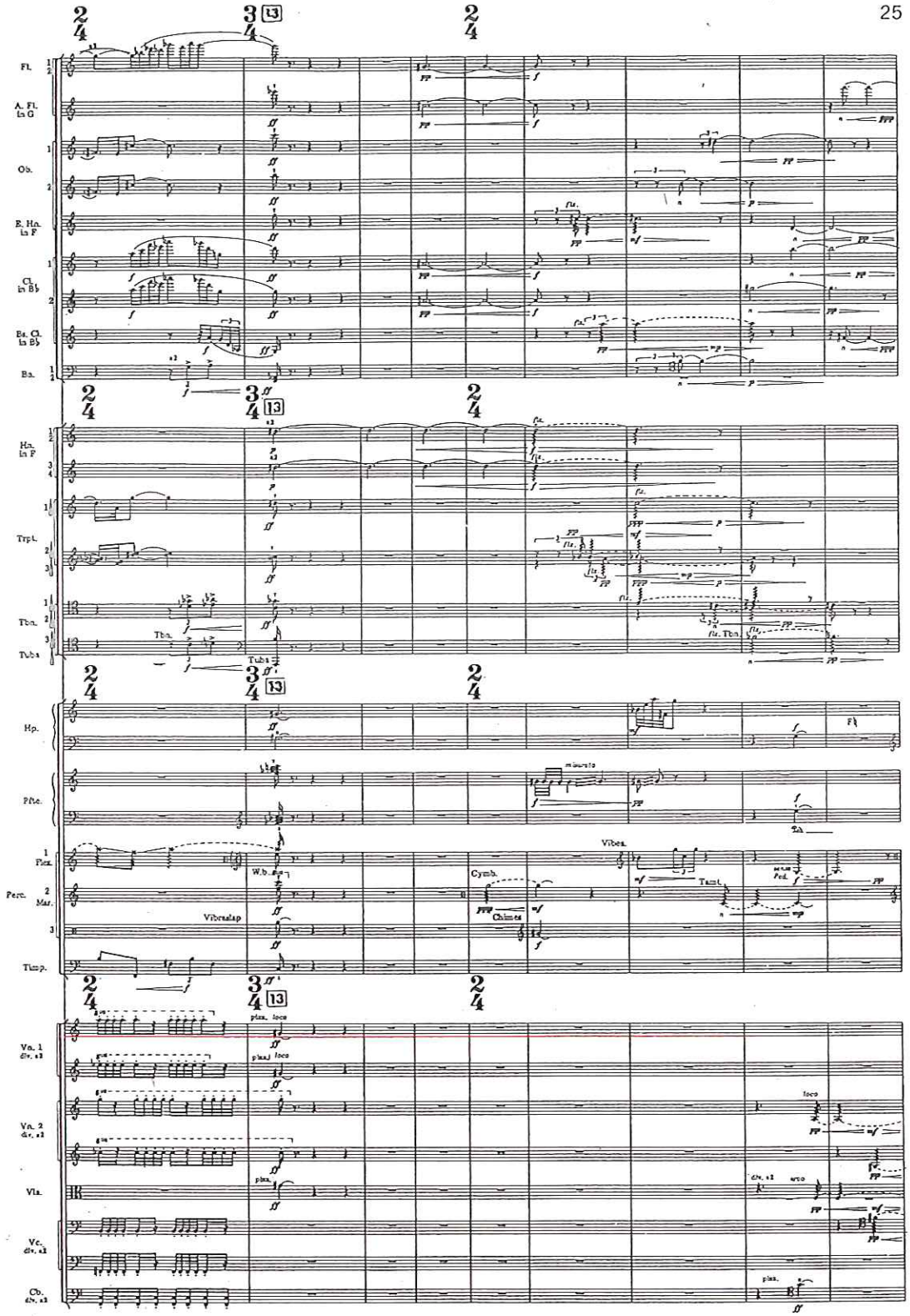
Druckman's early use of musical quotation is slight and subtle. *Incenters* (1968) draws its material from two seventh chords from Mussorgsky's *Boris Gudonov,* which are softly quoted at one point near the end. *Windows* alludes texturally to Debussy's *Jeux,* and *Mirage* (1976) contains three quotations from Debussy's *Sirenes.* In *Prism,* Druckman's most extensive quotation piece, there is no attempt to imitate the style of his archaic sources; earlier music appears in the background, interrupted by Druckman's fragmented textures. All three movements are based on music from earlier operas about the Medea myth, by Charpentier, Cavalli, and Cherubini. Medea was also the subject of Druckman's 1974 *Lamia* for soprano and orchestra, and of the opera he wrote for the Metropolitan. In 1986, however, this last work was canceled because Druckman was far behind schedule, and has never been performed. He died in 1996.

Listening Example: Druckman, Aureole *(1979)*

Aureole, a fine example of Druckman's orchestral technique, was an attempt to write an orchestra work that consisted of basically a single line; there are often only one or two notes heard at a time, and yet every page of the score uses instruments from every section of the orchestra,



EXAMPLE 9



EXAMPLE 9.7 Jacob Druckman, *Aureole.*

and that single line changes color continually. The idea of the aureole is heard in textures that surround the primary pitch with a halo of subsidiary notes. More personally, the piece is dedicated to Leonard Bernstein and develops its pitch line from the Kaddish theme of Bernstein's *Kaddish Symphony*. The most important motif is a dotted-eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythm that appears especially in the ubiquitous unpitched percussion; this rhythm is the rhythm of the *Kaddish* text. The textures are mercurial and evanescent except for two passages, one of them in the final pages, in which the divisi strings pick up a regular momentum of galloping repeated notes. Example 9.7 shows the end of the first such passage, along with the subsequent return to the orchestrated single line and its aureole.

Nancy Van de Vate

One of the finest New Romantic composers has remained little known in America, first because in the years she was active here there was little attention paid to women composers, and second because she has been an expatriate since 1982. Nancy Van de Vate is a superb orchestral colorist, and a composer of atmospheric, melancholy, and memorable works. Like Roy Harris and William Schuman, she has a tendency to limn her orchestral sonorities with dashes of percussion, especially vibraphone, xylophone, piano, and celeste. More pervasively, though, her music shows a kinship to the East European school of Penderecki and Lutoslawski, with thick, sustained string textures (sometimes tone clusters) and ultrachromatic melodic motives.

Born in 1930 in Plainfield, New Jersey, Van de Vate lived in the rural South for twenty years as she taught at a variety of schools. In 1968, she had her Piano Concerto performed under the name N. Van de Vate; upon introducing herself to the conductor, he asked why her husband wasn't present, assuming that *he* had been the composer. Subsequent to that experience, Van de Vate has become an active organizer for women composers, forming the International League of Women Composers in 1975 and serving as its chairperson for seven years. Eventually her academic career took her to the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, where she gained close-up experience of Asian music. Her first response upon discovering Indonesian gamelan was to write *Music for Viola, Percussion, and Piano* (1976)—a charming, energetic work whose ethnic influences bring it closer in sound to Bartók, however, than to anything Asian. In 1982 she moved to Jakarta, Indonesia, and she relocated in 1985 to Vienna, which has been her home base ever since. Her music's peculiarly colorful sadness stems from a smooth fusion of these disparate influences, postwar Polish avant-garde techniques with Balinese gamelan.

Consequently her best works evince an atmosphere of distance, such as *Journeys* (1981–1984), begun and finished in Jakarta and composed partly in Czechoslovakia. In *Journeys,* a warlike, four-note brass motif over a muted march rhythm gradually gives way to an extravaganza of percussion; and when the march motive reappears, it is now in percussion, with a calmer, more Asian feel. Much of Van de Vate's music deliberately evokes the spirit of wartime Eastern Europe, a Mahleresque blend of militarism and mourning heard in her *Katyn* (1989), *Chernobyl* (1987, commemorating the nuclear power plant accident), and *Krakow Concerto* (1988) for six percussionists and orchestra. The last-named work takes its impetus from an melody played by an offstage trumpet that is brutally interrupted by percussion, in reference to a story about a thirteenth-century bugler who was shot in the neck as he attempted to warn the people of Krakow about an approaching attack.

Van de Vate's music is more frankly tonal than Druckman's or Rochberg's, though it is never without an underpinning of dissonance. More saliently, her music has a long, slow emotional curve with much reliance on linear melody. As she explains, talking of the Asian influence on her music,

> Americans tend to be very fast-moving, to want to get to the bottom line. This does affect their music. Whereas in somewhat older cultures, the sense of speed is not so immanent. A piece can unfold very slowly. It can sit on just one note for 20 or 30 or 40 seconds, and people can enjoy just listening to the sound of the instrument.[20]

Van de Vate gives the appearance of coming by her Romanticism naturally, rather than in conscious imitation of any previous style. Because of this, and because her music is less abstract than that of most of the neoromantics, it is more memorable as well.

Postmodernists

The New Romantics can be divided into the postmodernists—who sought stylistic pluralism in a collage aesthetic (middle-period Rochberg, Bolcom, Foss, Del Tredici)—and those who resynthesized a smooth, consistent language analogous to nineteenth-century Romanticism or mild-mannered early modernism (Van de Vate, Singleton, Harbison, Tower, Bresnick). As a collective movement, collage was a short-lived aesthetic of the late sixties and seventies. However, several composers have sustained the assertion that stylistic unity is a dead issue and that the past is ours to imitate and plunder.

Chief and most talented among these is William Bolcom, the leading "Uptown" proponent of the attempt to break down barriers between classical and vernacular music. Bolcom seems to have been impelled

toward postmodernism by a congenital inability to devote himself either to "high" or "low" musical genres to the exclusion of the other. He has led an active performing career as a leading pianist in the ragtime revival of the sixties and as a performer of American theater music with his singer-wife Joan Morris. These connections inform Bolcom's music as well, which is thoroughly and deliberately polystylistic. His stated desire is to "treat the musical language more like spoken language: as a constantly evolving creature always taking on new flesh and bone, yet retaining its most ancient elements."[21]

Born in Seattle in 1938, he studied with Milhaud and Messiaen in Paris and has taught at the University of Michigan since 1973. He entered the postmodern fray early; by 1971 he had written a pastiche for orchestra, *Commedia,* made up of phrases that could have come from Berlioz or Mozart or Donizetti, covered over at times by quasi-serialist gestures and Ivesian tone-clouds. Bolcom's *Open House* (1975), a setting of seven Theodore Roethke poems, is frankly heterogeneous; the first two movements are atonally expressionistic, the third a late-Mahler adagio, the fourth a light-hearted waltz, the fifth in a jazzy theater style, the seventh modeled after Bach. The aims of *Open House* were extended in what is considered Bolcom's masterpiece, *Songs of Innocence and Experience,* an evening-length cycle of songs based on William Blake. This massive work, which Bolcom labored on from 1956 to 1981 and which received its premiere in 1984, ranged in style from high Romanticism to atonality to jazz to rock. In general his style of the late eighties is more homogeneous, though the funny "Scherzo Mortale" of his Fifth Symphony (1990) takes the wedding march from *Lohengrin* as counterpoint to "Abide with Me," then rushes into a foxtrot version of the love-death music from *Tristan.*

Lukas Foss could be placed in almost any chapter because his career went through so many phases. Born in Berlin in 1922, he moved to the U.S. in 1937, studying with Randall Thompson and Hindemith. He began, in his 1944 cantata *The Prairie,* as a neoclassicist with strong Romantic leanings. His interests changed when, teaching at UCLA, he tried out twelve-tone techniques, controlled improvisation, proportional notation, limited chance processes, theater pieces, game pieces, and finally quotation and collage in experimental works such as *Echoi* (1963) and *Paradigm* (1968). His most widely known work used to be *Time Cycle* of 1959–1960, a setting for soprano and chamber orchestra (with a version for large orchestra) of texts by Auden, Housman, Kafka, and Nietzsche that all have to do with time. Though it is a nicely crafted response to the then-prevalent Webern worship, with its textually motivated evocation of ticking clocks, in hindsight its idiom of rampant major-seventh and minor-ninth intervals seem thin and undistinctive.

Foss's most successful work after *Time Cycle* was *Baroque Variations* (1967), a three-movement work based on pieces by Bach, Händel, and

Scarlatti. The work contains such techniques as the orchestra playing Händel with many of the notes silent, so that only a chord here and there is actually heard; and string clusters and glissandos obscuring a Scarlatti sonata played on a harpsichord, whose phrases are echoed out-of-tempo in the brass and winds. The surreal result is a stream of musical conventions dimly remembered, distantly heard, and distorted. The unsentimental reworking of earlier music played an increasing role in Foss's work, one of his prettiest and least satirical homages being his *Renaissance Concerto* for flute (1986). It is difficult to deny that Foss was something of a style-chaser, though his solid Germanic musical training brought polish to his every phase. He has been a lively figure in American music, less as a composer than as conductor of the Brooklyn Philharmonic from 1971 to 1991.

David Del Tredici has led a career remarkably associated with a single literary work: Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.* Born in California in 1937, he studied with Seymour Shifrin, Roger Sessions, and Andrew Imbrie before coming to public attention with a thorny twelve-tone setting of two James Joyce poems called *Syzygy* (1966; the title means the strong union of opposites or unrelated elements). Starting in 1968 with *Pop-Pourri,* however, he mined the vein of Carroll's *Alice* books, which led to a new aesthetic of quotation and satirical Romanticism. His early *Alice* works, such as *The Lobster Quadrille* (1969, later part of *An Alice Symphony*) were dissonant and angular and yet playful, with ironic quotations. By *Final Alice* (1976) for orchestra with saxophones, mandolin, banjo, accordion, and narrator, he had evolved a style steeped in Romanticism but often skewed, with huge Mahlerian climaxes blurred by instruments playing out of sync. Del Tredici's list of *Alice*-inspired works—including *Vintage Alice* (1972), *Child Alice* (1977–1981, over two hours long), and *Haddocks' Eyes* (1986)—suggests monomania, but a charming one.

It is surprising, given the inherent dramatic tensions of their music, that the postmodernists have not included a generation of born opera composers as the Americana movement did. Several of the New Romantics tried their hands at an opera or two: Rochberg's *The Confidence Man* (1982), Bolcom's *McTeague,* Alvin Singleton's *Dream Sequence '76* (1976), Harbison's *The Winter's Tale* (1974). Aside from Adams's two efforts, however, the movement's most successful opera was John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles,* premiered by the Metropolitan in 1992, a climax of postmodern pastiche. So focused was Corigliano (born 1938, son of the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic) on the classical tradition that he and his librettist William M. Hoffman took as their starting point the third play of Beaumarchais's *Figaro* trilogy, of which the first two had served for Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville.*

The Ghosts of Versailles is an opera-within-an-opera, the outer structure involving a supposed romance between Marie Antoinette and

Beaumarchais. The playwright stages an opera to entertain Marie's court of ghosts and also to change history by depicting her being rescued from prison and whisked off to America. The action revolves around the long-time operatic hero Figaro, who steals a diamond necklace to buy the queen's ransom. Just as the plot is about to succeed, however, Marie Antoinette realizes that the judgment of history was correct; by accepting her own death, she is freed. Corigliano's music ranges freely among eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century styles, using Mozartean recitative for the internal opera (including quotations from Mozart and Rossini), ambiguous chromaticism for the ghost scenes, and passionate Romanticism for the love scenes and emotional climaxes. Despite the seriousness of the plot, the opera contains a strong element of self-conscious caricature; at the first act's chaotic climax, a soprano in Wagnerian valkyrie garb enters to wail, "This is not opera!" She is wrong, however; this is an opera in love with the European history of opera.

Other New Romanticists and Unreconstructed Classicists

More numerous are the composers who developed their own homogenous languages drawn from the materials of late romanticism and early modernism. Typically, these composers shy away from well-worn tonal materials such as triads and seventh chords, preserving tonal ambiguity while allowing a general feeling of tonality. As a result (and Van de Vate is a strong example), their musics tend to have some affinity with that of East European composers who embraced modernism without renouncing tonality: Bartók, Lutoslawski, Martinů, even late Scriabin and Stravinsky's milder neoclassic style.

One of the best of these composers is Alvin Singleton. Like Van de Vate, he spent much of his career as an expatriate; born in New York in 1940, he lived in Vienna and Graz for fourteen years in the seventies and early eighties. From 1985 to 1988, however, he was composer-in-residence for the Atlanta Symphony, and he remains there. As a rare African-American working in a European-derived symphonic medium, he offers an unusual sensibility: "My musical ideal," he has said, "would be to combine the spirit of James Brown with the organizational skill of Lutoslawski."[22] Despite that aim, the elements of his work are well integrated, and in his orchestral works such as *Shadows* (1987) and *A Yellow Rose Petal* (1982), the Lutoslawski connection is more evident. Particularly effective and akin to Van de Vate's music, *Shadows* is a long orchestral crescendo over a drone on E, a passacaglia whose competing melodies in quietly conflicting tonalities suggest "shadows" of various jazz and classical styles.

Joseph Schwantner's musical language has much in common with Crumb's, in terms of writing atmospheric works dotted with odd instrumental effects; he, too, has used crystal glasses rubbed with wetted fingertips, bowed cymbals, whistling instrumentalists, and gongs lowered into water after being struck. Schwantner was born in Chicago in 1943 and has taught at Eastman since 1970. His early works were twelve-tone, but from the early seventies on extremely coloristic, and since 1975 his music has veered toward a bittersweet tonality. A basic Schwantner rhetorical archetype—an angular solo melody over a shimmering, indistinct background—appears as early as the twelve-tone *Diaphonia Intervallum* (1965). *Modus caelestis* (1972) is noteworthy for its tinkly backgrounds of mallet percussion and cloudy sonorities of twelve flutes. *Aftertones of Infinity* (1978), an orchestral work, relies on recurring gestures within a mysterious stasis of ringing sonorities. Some of Schwantner's most effective textures (for instance in *Distant Runes and Incantations* of 1987) stem from the ostinato-like repetition of complex figures. While Schwantner's music doesn't have the immediately recognizable aura of Crumb's, it is meatier in musical content, and he may be a better colorist than Druckman.

John Harbison, Joan Tower, and Martin Bresnick can all be characterized as having neither returned to Romanticism nor quoted earlier musics, but having instead settled into accessible yet somewhat thorny idioms that wed clear motivic processes to a constant level of tonal ambiguity. Harbison, the most prolific of the three, was born in New Jersey in 1938, and studied with Piston, Sessions, and Earl Kim. He has been composer in residence with both the Pittsburgh and Los Angeles symphony orchestras.

Harbison's music is translucently clear in its motivic development, Romantic in its fluid continuity, neoclassic in its forms, and never without a dash of polytonal dissonance. The edge in his music is sometimes achieved by applying twelve-tone devices (such as inversion of sonorities) within basically tonal contexts. His 1981 Piano Quintet is a particularly accessible example of his chamber music. Harbison sets the English language with pragmatic effectiveness; he is known for song cycles that set off the poetry well, such as *Words from Paterson* (1989) for voice and ensemble, based on William Carlos Williams. He has written an effective chamber opera after Yates, *Full Moon in March* (1977), notable for its ensemble use of a prepared piano, and his Christmas cantata *The Flight into Egypt* (1986) is stately in its Stravinskian archaic grandeur. At its best Harbison's music memorably recreates the motivically generated climaxes of his classical predecessors; at his worst, the music is overly facile and a little generic.

Joan Tower, born 1938 in New Rochelle, New York, writes music of tremendous energy and clarity in a style that is neither dissonant nor quite tonal. Her music is supremely organic, growing from a central

principle. Her orchestral piece *Sequoia* (1979–1981), for example, is structured like a redwood tree, starting with a central drone on G from which symmetrical harmonies grow, branches developing smaller branches. Often some type of transformation occurs, as in *Black Topaz* (1976), for piano and six instruments, in which the music's unusual, piano-studded textures move from harsh dissonance to gently shimmering consonance. Tower dedicated her *Celebration* to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and conducted it at the White House in 1993. A curious problem developed when she won the Grawemeyer Award in 1990 for her orchestral work *Silver Ladders*; the papers announced that she was the first native American to win the award (meaning the first winner born in America), but it came out as Native American, and she was deluged with questions as to what tribe she came from. Her forebears, nevertheless, came over from Europe.

Martin Bresnick has not become nearly as well-known as the quality of his music deserves; no other recent uptown composer possess a style so elegantly smooth or can say so much with so few notes. Born in New York in 1946, he studied in Europe with Ligeti and Gottfried von Einem and at Stanford with John Chowning. Bresnick's works are marked by economy of materials and lyrical intensity. For example, his superb Piano Trio of 1987–1988 opens with a slow, downward arpeggio of four sustained notes: D, F♯, B, D♯. From this point, the movement hardly changes texture as it moves with inexorable logic from one tonal area to another. The secret of Bresnick's language is that he has developed an intervallic way of working with tonality that allows for a smooth continuum between tonality and atonality. His busily buzzing *B's Garland* (1973), scored for eight cellos, ranges fluidly from busily buzzing cluster effects to sweet romanticism without sounding like pastiche. Recently, Bresnick has become best known as an influential teacher at Yale for several of his students—Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, David Lang, and Evan Ziporyn (all discussed in chapter 13)—are among the best composers of the new generation.

Christopher Rouse's Symphony No. 1 (1988) seems to pick up the symphonic tradition where Sessions and Mennin had left it; its final moments even culminate in a quotation from the *Adagio* of the Bruckner Seventh. However, quotation is incidental to Rouse's aesthetic; he is so much an adherent of the Great Romantic tradition that he might rather be called simply neoromantic than New Romantic. Born 1949 in Baltimore, he studied at Oberlin with Randolph Coleman (a fine Midwestern conceptualist whose reputation remains primarily local), with Karel Husa at Cornell, and privately with Crumb. His works such as *Phantasmata* (1985), with its perpetual-motion middle movement *The Infernal Machine,* are characterized by extremes of speed and slowness, soaring violin lines in the highest register, extreme dissonance within basically tonal contexts, and climaxes punctuated by heavy percussion.

Ezra Sims is one of those unclassifiable figures whose relation to any movement can only be tangential. Born in 1928 in Birmingham, Alabama, he studied with Quincy Porter, Milhaud, and Kirchner. His music has a streak of postromanticism, but he is distinguished from the other composers in this chapter by being a microtonalist. He divides the octave into seventy-two steps—a versatile division that allows for quarter-tones, sixth-tones, and good approximations of the seventh and eleventh harmonics. His Sextet (1981) makes mellow chamber music from Louis Armstrong's rendition of "St. James Infirmary," accurately matching the great trumpeter's inflections. Like his fellow Southerners Johnston and Duckworth, Sims evinces an affection for the Southern hymnody of his youth; for example, *All Done from Memory* (1980) is a violin variation on "Lily of the Valley." As a microtonalist he has had neither the academic security nor the commissions of most composers discussed in this chapter, and he has worked as a steel worker, mail clerk, and music librarian at Harvard. He has written mostly chamber music, including four string quartets, and his music is as deeply felt as it is intonationally peculiar.

Much better known, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich has been celebrated as the first woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize for music (in 1983 for her First Symphony). As the first woman marked with the official imprimatur of the classical establishment (unlike Oliveros, Lockwood, Monk, Anderson, and Van de Vate, who have all remained outsiders), she has received a continuing abundance of commissions; also, one suspects, because of her mild, conservative, middle-of-the-road style. Born in 1939 in Miami, she studied with Carter and Sessions, and her works (Concerto Grosso of 1985, Double Quartet of 1984) tend to be abstract, in traditional multimovement forms. Like many oft-commissioned composers, she tends toward concertos, and she has written one each for trumpet (1984), flute (1990), trombone (1988), oboe (1991), and piano (1986). A violinist herself, she writes music of great polish, but her style is not distinctive, and seems to belong to an earlier era.

The New Romantics: Younger Generation

There are many, many younger composers still working within basically classical idioms, most of them students of either the composers discussed in this chapter or of the twelve-tone composers. A few of the best of them will be mentioned here. Most began working, under the influence of their academic training, in a complex, virtuosic idiom, then at some point rebelled and moved in the direction of clearer forms and tonalities evocative of past music.

For example, like George Rochberg, George Tsontakis (born 1951 in New York) broke with modernism between his Second (1984) and Third (1986) String Quartets. As a student of Sessions and Stockhausen,

he wrote his early music in a Bergian, chromatic vein, but in the Third Quartet discovered a thoughtful, introverted idiom capable of mediating among several tonal and atonal styles. His *Four Symphonic Quartets* (1996), for orchestra without voices yet based on the *Four Quartets* of T. S. Eliot, are characterized by a French-style orchestration, with passages akin to Debussy and Brahms.[23] Tsontakis's music possesses a sense of grand, almost Beethovenian gesture.

Peter Lieberson (b. 1946) burst upon the scene in 1983 with a Piano Concerto whose tonality, cadences, and airy orchestration owe much to neoclassic Stravinsky but whose mercurial continuity is more reminiscent of his twelve-tone teachers Babbitt and Donald Martino. Born in 1946, the son of the composer and Columbia Records executive Goddard Lieberson (1911–1977), he became involved in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, which he studied with Chogyam Trungpa. The interest has found expression in several of Lieberson's works based on Tibetan sources, such as the *Drala Symphony* (1986), *Gesar Legend* (1988) for orchestra, and the chamber opera *King Gesar* (1991), the latter two based on the life of a Tibetan warrior king. Lieberson lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he teaches Buddhism as director of Shambhala Training.

Robert Carl (b. 1954) was a student of Rochberg, among others, and inherited something of his lyrical and quotation-oriented sensibility. Yet Carl also did his doctoral dissertation on Carl Ruggles's *Sun-Treader,* and the great angular leaps of Ruggles's music pervade Carl's as well, if in less strident tones. Carl's music often plays with ghostlike anticipations and reminiscences; for example, one of his most characteristic essays, *Time/Memory/Shadow* (1988), is written for two trios, of which one comments ethereally on materials played by the other, all leading up to a nostalgic quotation of a neoclassic march Carl wrote in youth. Perhaps his germinal work, a piano sonata called *Spiral Dances* (1984), likewise gradually wrings a waltz in F minor from the crashing jaws of atonality. In recent chamber works such as *Pensées Nocturnes* (1994), Carl has settled into a more serene, meditative idiom, but still with a dissonant edge. Since 1984 he has taught at the Hartt School of Music.

Scott Wheeler is a rare Virgil Thomson protégé, and he also studied at Brandeis with Arthur Berger and Harold Shapero and privately with Peter Maxwell Davies. His music, which started in a rather complex, twelve-tone-derived idiom, has gone in "the direction of Irving Fine neoclassicism. . . . It has a sense of reserve that I like, expressive on a modest scale, never in an overblown romantic style."[24] This is certainly true of works like *Four Corners* (1990, a memorial for Thomson), a quiet, tonal, almost impressionist tone poem for small orchestra with touches reminiscent of Copland and Thomson. However, Wheeler's more overriding aim has been to achieve an operatic idiom that learns from Broadway's clear sense of theater. So far this aim has found its largest expression in his large lyric cantata, *The Construction of Boston* (1988), a

neoclassic work complete with harpsichord and banjo. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1952, Wheeler was a cofounder of Boston's Dinosaur Annex ensemble and has directed it since 1982.

Daniel Asia (born 1953 in Seattle) writes symphonies in a solidly tonal, somewhat impressionistic style drawn from brief, diatonic melodic motives. The reliance on these motives gives the music a slight postminimal flavor, and the combination of that flavor with a sense of grand orchestral gesture gives Asia's music an aura not too dissimilar from some of John Adams's post–*Grand Pianola* music. He studied with Druckman and Krzystzof Penderecki at Yale, founded the New York ensemble Musical Elements in 1977, and in 1988 joined the faculty of the University of Arizona at Tucson. His symphonies, four so far, include No. 2, the *Celebration Symphony* (1988–1990), written in memoriam Leonard Bernstein, and infused with the mood of Jewish liturgy. These composers have found viable career paths in the classical music world, and as long as that world exists, there will probably always be a New Romanticism.

Notes

1. Quoted in liner notes to *Contra Mortem et Tempus,* Composers Recordings Incorporated 231, New York.
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3. Ibid., pp. 158–59.
4. Quoted in Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), p. 156.
5. For instance, "Cognitive constraints on compositional systems," in John A. Sloboda, ed., *Generative Processes in Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 231–59.
6. David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London: Eulenberg Books, 1983), p. 132.
7. Quoted in liner notes to *Steps and Haddocks' Eyes,* New World Records NWR 80390-2.
8. Quoted in Richard Dufallo, *Trackings: Composers Speak with Richard Dufallo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 163.
9. Quoted in liner notes, *John Coligliano: Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra,* New World NW 309, 1981.
10. William Bolcom, liner notes to *Open House and Commedia,* Nonesuch H-71324, 1976.
11. Quoted in K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon Press, Ltd.), p. 179.
12. Ibid., pp. 174–75.
13. Ibid., p. 179.
14. Quoted in liner notes, *The Wound-Dresser and Fearful Symmetries,* Nonesuch CD 9 79218-2, 1989.

15. Liner notes, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!,* hat ART CD 6066.
16. Ibid.
17. Quoted in liner notes, *De Profundis,* hat ART CD 6134, 1993 (slightly condensed from Wilde's original text).
18. Quoted in Richard Dufallo, *Trackings: Composers Speak with Richard Dufallo,* pp. 247–48.
19. Quoted in Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers,* p. 155.
20. "The Music of Nancy Van De Vate," *American Public Radio Program,* Ev Grimes, producer.
21. William Bolcom, liner notes, *Open House and Commedia.*
22. Quoted in liner notes, *Shadows, After Fallen Crumbs, and A Yellow Rose Petal,* Nonesuch 9 79231-2, 1989.
23. Interview with the author, December 26, 1996.
24. Interview with the author, December 15, 1996.