

Post-Cage Conceptualism

The 1960s were a period of intense questioning of virtually every cultural assumption. What is art? What is music? What authority do governments have to send young men to war? Why are wars really fought—for legitimate principles or economic interests? Why “should” men have shorter hair than women? Why should people wear clothes? Why should they wait until marriage to have sex? Why shouldn’t people relieve the monotony of their existence with psychedelic drugs? No assumption, it seemed, was so basic that the young people of the sixties couldn’t call it into question. To some extent, the explosion was a reaction to the overwhelming conformity of the postwar era, an era in which stabilization and restoration of economic growth had been paramount priorities. President Eisenhower, a five-star general who commanded the U.S. forces in Europe during World War II, had represented the uniformity of military discipline; John Kennedy (served 1961–1963), at forty-three the youngest man ever elected U.S. president, seemed to usher in an era of youth and new possibilities.

The immense spectrum of answers opened up by the question “What is art?” makes the sixties an especially difficult decade to summarize. Anything you could imagine being presented as a work of art *was* presented as such, along with many more things almost no one could imagine. The conventions of musical performance were overhauled. One of the more radical gestures was a series of “pieces” called *Listen* (1966–1968), in which composer Max Neuhaus took an audience, each person with the word “LISTEN” stamped on his or her hand, through found-sound environments such as power plants and subway stations. In another “piece,” *Homage to John Cage*, Nam June Paik poured shampoo on Cage’s head and cut off his tie. One 1969 piece by Phillip Corner has yet to be performed: “One anti-personnel type-CBU bomb will be thrown into the audience.” Annea Lockwood burned pianos amplified by asbestos-covered microphones and followed one such performance in 1968 with a séance at which Beethoven’s spirit was allegedly aroused. We can only wonder what he thought of the milieu he found.

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Partly as a consequence of the ephemerality and nondocumentability of many conceptualist works, it seems likely that less music will survive in performance from the sixties than from any other decade of the century, because to the question, "Hey, can *this* be art?", the answer is frequently, "Yeah, you can *call* it art, but so what?" Yet the decade was a fascinating learning experience, yielding an enormous supply of musical anecdotes if nothing else. Spurred on by Cage, it cleared the stage of the last vestiges of European high-art obligations and freed composers to start again from zero.

It also initiated a radical split in American music's self-image. In 1961 in Manhattan, an Asian-American pianist named Yoko Ono—at first the wife of the Cage-influenced composer Toshi Ichihyanagi, later famous for her marriage to the rock star John Lennon—began a new trend by opening up her downtown Manhattan loft for performances of experimental music. Ono's move, and the concert series curated at her loft by La Monte Young and Richard Maxfield, initiated a downtown tradition of presenting new music informally in rough, unconventional spaces. This geographic dislocation resulted in an entire new body of work, so-called "Downtown music," though in many respects it continued the experimental tradition inherited from Ives, Cowell, Partch, and Cage. In 1979, Downtown music—mostly conceptualist and minimalist—made its first public collective splash at New York's experimental arts space The Kitchen in a widely-attended festival called New Music New York. From this moment, the music that traced its inheritance back to Cage's *4'33"* had a new, overly vague but widely used name: New Music.

Despite this downtown Manhattan identification, the sixties and seventies were the period in which music decentralized and spread across the nation. The Midwest scene, in many ways more innovative and less doctrinaire than the coasts, centered loosely around college towns along Interstate 80: Ann Arbor, Oberlin, Champaign-Urbana, Iowa City, Bloomington. Activities in Ann Arbor were particularly intense between 1958 and 1969 because of the ONCE festivals. By the 1980s, though, the Midwest scene was moribund, several of the protagonists having moved to New York, and the universities involved having discontinued the practice of hiring radical composers.

The sprawling group of tendencies gathered together here under the rubric of conceptualism is not a unitary phenomenon. One might delineate several points of crystallization within which the music of this chapter can be fluidly located. One endpoint came directly from John Cage: since sounds were considered more interesting when freed from having to express the composer's ego, any process or concept or activity that caused sounds might well result in something interestingly unforeseen to listen to. The sonic result of the piece would be a side effect of the actual activity, and thus outside the "composer's" control. Such a

thought process lay behind a piece such as Larry Austin's *Accidents*, in which the pianist tries to avoid making sounds, or Alvin Lucier's *Vespers*, in which performers explore a space using echolocation devices.

Another endpoint, related but different in emphasis, was the insight that a concept itself could be a work of art, that the appreciation of a work of art could take place entirely within the imagination without having any manifestation in the physical world at all. This attitude led to the creation of hundreds of word-pieces, brief descriptions striking for their whimsicality, paradoxical nature, or impossibility of realization. Thus La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #15*: "This piece is little whirlpools out in the middle of the ocean." Or Takehisa Kosugi's *Music for a Revolution*: "Scoop out one of your eyes 5 years from now and do the same with the other eye 5 years later." Or Nam June Paik's *Danger Music No. 5*: "Creep into the vagina of a living whale." In between these two poles were verbal-instruction pieces that could be carried out or at least attempted, the bizarre nature of the attempt serving to entertain the presumably hip audience. For instance, Young's *Composition 1960 #5*: "Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area."

Beyond this is still another conceptualist paradigm (and these given by no means exhaust the possibilities). Especially in the Midwest, conceptualism evolved partly as an expansion of serialism. Midwestern composers took their cues from Europeans like Stockhausen, Kagel, Bussotti, and others who had started with Anton Webern's music (*not* Schoenberg's) and taken it several steps further. If twelve pitches or twelve durations or twelve timbres could be organized with a row, why not twelve quotations? Twelve styles of music? Twelve actions? And so Salvatore Martirano's *Ballad* (1966) organizes several popular songs sung by an amplified singer within a serialist instrumental texture. This brand of conceptualism, found in the works of James Tenney, Roger Reynolds, Larry Austin, Dary John Mizelle, and others, translated concepts by analogy and metaphor into musical scores of often extreme complexity. Many of the notated-music conceptualists share with the minimalists (for whom see chapter 8) a love of gradual and systematic processes. What they do not share is any concern for the more accessible and atmospheric aspects of minimalism, such as a steady beat, repetitions, and diatonic tonality.

As if in deliberate fulfillment of Cage's statement that "all music is theater," conceptualism erased the line between music and theater, and often those between the other arts as well. Theatrical "happenings" occurred throughout the sixties, sometimes planned in detail and sometimes spontaneously, with little documentation, and often with painters, actors, and musicians trading roles. Such happenings often attempted "information overload," the piling up of activity and information until the listener-observer is no longer able to keep track of everything that's happening. The conceptualist word-pieces were equally opaque to under-

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standing and ambiguous as to medium. Is “little whirlpools out in the middle of the ocean” a piece of conceptualist music, after all, or a conceptualist painting, or conceptualist theater? Conceptualism allowed artists to dabble in arts other than their own and was in part a reaction against the virtuosity and expertise of the European classical establishment.

As a result, the roster of artists who could be included in this chapter is enormous. And yet, because of the short-lived nature of much conceptualist work, this era is less well-known to the general public today than any other in American music. If the era was a wild free-for-all, it was also austere, peopled by composers who wanted no trace of nostalgia in their music, no reminder of what music had been. The conceptualist era was an extremely important one, nevertheless, marking a turning point in the definition of music.

Robert Ashley

Electronically innovative, socially provocative, and incorrigibly theatrical, Robert Ashley epitomizes the conceptualism of the 1960s, yet more than any other figure he has also transcended it. No other composer is so associated with, or recognizable by, his own voice: mellow, nonchalant, and invitingly husky, he has used it in almost every work.

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on March 28, 1930, Ashley studied at the University of Michigan and the Manhattan School of Music, studying acoustics and composition with Wallingford Riegger, Ross Lee Finney, Leslie Bassett, and Roberto Gerhard. Though he never taught at the University of Michigan, he participated in a heady scene revolving around the famous ONCE festivals of contemporary music, which ran from 1958 to 1969. These festivals, organized by the ONCE group (including Ashley, Gordon Mumma, Roger Reynolds, filmmaker George Manupelli, Donald Scavarda, and George Cacioppo), had nothing to do with the University of Michigan, whose music department, in fact, frowned on such seemingly frivolous music. With three other electronic composers—David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, and Alvin Lucier—Ashley formed the Sonic Arts Union, a group that toured America and Europe to perform electronic theater music by its members.

Ashley’s most oft-cited early work was a notorious theater piece for his own voice and noisy tape collage: *Wolfman* (1964). A 1968 *Source* magazine review describes the piece as follows:

It depicts that moment in time known to anyone who has ever attended a crowded restaurant, night club or bar—that moment when the sound becomes unbearable. . . . The piece begins with a tape collage of restaurant-bar sounds and is immediately recognized as such. After about a minute of the collage, the vocalist [Ashley]

walks into the spotlight. He begins to project long, continuously altered (by the vocalist) sounds, each duration consisting of one full breath. Gradually the relatively articulate collage is transformed into an inchoate mass of electronic sound, the voice overcoming the holocaust of feedback in the circuit and becoming more and more indistinguishable from the tape. The volume level is extremely high; the audience is literally surrounded by a wall of sound that is comparable to and even surpassing that of today's rock music.¹

In another, equally provocative nightclub-ambiance piece, *Purposeful Lady Slow Afternoon* (1968), a woman hesitantly, without using any explicit words, describes being forced to give oral sex, over a disarmingly innocent accompaniment of bells.

By the late seventies Ashley was known as a kind of "bad boy" of the avant-garde, whose provocative theatrical works were highly conceptual. Then, around 1978, he began experimenting with automatic speech, and found himself building up a long poem which would become the libretto for an opera, *Perfect Lives*. He developed *Perfect Lives* in stages, originally performing it as a solo text, with piano and tape, and ultimately with other singers and video. Ashley loves to slowly pile layer upon layer of text and music onto a work until the listener is hard put to decipher all the meaning, thus achieving information overload.

Since *Perfect Lives*, Ashley has written several more operas evolved from the same set of characters: first *Atalanta*, then a tetralogy of four operas grouped together as *Now Eleanor's Idea: Improvement: Don Leaves Linda, Foreign Experiences, El Aficionado, and Now Eleanor's Idea* (the "title opera" of the tetralogy). However, Ashley's operas are not at all operas in the conventional, European sense: they're made for television, with video as a primary component. "I put my pieces in television format," he has said,

because I believe that's really the only possibility for music. I hate to say that. But I don't believe that this recent fashion of American composers trying to imitate stage opera from Europe means anything. . . . We don't have any tradition. If you've never been to the Paris Opera, never been to La Scala, never been to the Met more than once, we're talking primitivism. How can you write the pieces if you've never been there? It's like Eskimos playing baseball.²

Ashley's approach to art is highly collaborative. While he creates the text and rhythmic structure, his musical accompaniments and video images are often the handiwork of the brilliant artists he's surrounded himself with: pianist "Blue" Gene Tyranny (stage name of Robert Sheff), baritone Thomas Buckner, soprano Jacqueline Humbert, the well-known vocal virtuoso Joan LaBarbara, and several others.

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With so many people involved, there is rarely a score to the opera in any complete sense. In some of the operas the singers perform with headphones that cue them as to rhythm and pitch, allowing for a stunning precision of speaking in perfect unison. Being for television, the operas are divided into 22-minute segments, 22 minutes being defined in the TV world as a commercial half-hour. Unfortunately, however, because of their innovativeness, most of Ashley's operas have not yet been produced on television. *Perfect Lives* has been aired only in Great Britain.

Listening Example: Perfect Lives

Perfect Lives is structured in seven television-length episodes. Each movement of the opera is based on a different cyclic rhythm scheme, all at a tempo of 72 beats a minute. The rhythmic patterns are as follows:

The Park (Privacy Rules)	13 beats (8 plus 5)
The Supermarket (Famous People)	5 beats
The Bank (Victimless Crime)	9 beats (5 plus 4, 4 plus 5)
The Bar (Differences)	7 beats (4 plus 3, 3 plus 4)
The Living Room (The Solutions)	4 beats (in triplets, 12/8)
The Church (After the Fact)	4 beats (duple)
The Backyard (T' Be Continued)	triplets in 5-beat and 6-beat lines

Ashley speaks the text of each opera more or less in rhythm over a background of taped music augmented by live speakers and musicians in an abstracted rock vernacular.

The libretto of *Perfect Lives* wanders on the periphery of the actual story, referring to it obliquely and digressing into metaphysics and visual images. Raoul and Buddy ("The World's Greatest Piano Player") come to a small Midwestern town to play at the Perfect Lives Lounge. There they fall in with two locals, Isolde and her brother Donnie, captain of the football team. The four form a plan: to steal all the money from the local bank for one day and then return it. Buddy's dogs create a diversion at the bank, and they take the money off with friends Ed and Gwyn, who are eloping. Isolde's father, the sheriff, figures out the plot, but too late. Ed and Gwyn are married at the church, after which the friends meet in Isolde's backyard to celebrate the twilight.

This surreal plot becomes a pretext for Ashley's stream-of-consciousness monologue made up of bits of Midwestern speech patterns. As the music opens with exotic calm, and Buddy ("Blue" Gene Tyranny) starts tickling the ivories, we picture Raoul ("a slightly seedy older man") in his motel room:

He takes himself seriously.
Motel rooms have lost their punch for him.

The feeling is expressed in bags.
 There are two and inside those two there are two more.
 It's not an easy situation, but there is something like
 abandon in the air....
 One of the bags contains
 a bottle of liquor.
 A sure sign of thoughtfulness
 about who one might have been.
 He pours himself a small drink in a fluted
 plastic glass sans ice.
 He thinks to himself, if I were from the bigtown,
 I would be calm and debonair.
 The bigtown
 doesn't send its riffraff out.³

Three episodes later, Raoul and Buddy enter the Bar, where Buddy sits down at the piano and begins a monologue to entertain the other patrons:

Hi, my name is Buddy. If I could help you make the
 Load a little lighter, it would be my pleasure.
 We've all felt that it's hard, at least harder than
 We think it should be, and we look for change.
 It's my way—it's been given me—to move among
 The people, and to know our nature.
 So, I should not hesitate to share my thoughts
 And my experience with you.
 For instance, to begin from the beginning, as it
 Should be:
 There is only one Self. That Self is
 Light. The Self is ageless.
 The body has four forms, times,
 Eras, four ages.
 But the Self the one and only Self is ageless,
 Without age and without aging.⁴

Ashley patterned *Perfect Lives* after the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an ancient scripture that is intended to be read into the ear of a dying person to guide him through the afterlife, to help him stay permanently in Nirvana and avoid reincarnation. Ashley's protagonists move with a kind of Zen calm, as if operating from the standpoint of a higher Self, stepping back to view everyday things in terms of metaphysics. Whether one is attuned to such esoteric meanings or not, *Perfect Lives* is an entertaining work in a mild rock vernacular whose verbal images, as one character puts it, "massage the brain."

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Pauline Oliveros

If Cage could be said to have a female counterpart, it would have to be Pauline Oliveros, whose activities have been similarly universal in their attempt to alter human behavior in spiritually beneficial ways. It is fitting to her role as the avant-garde's premier female artist that she has molded her work to the supremely feminine archetype of receptivity, specifically a radical receptivity to sound. Like Cage, she has been among the hardest figures for the classical music establishment to take seriously. Her performances frequently involve the audience making sounds of their own choosing, with directions that leave much to the imagination.

Born in Houston in 1932, Oliveros grew up playing the accordion. As it turned out, no choice could have been more felicitous, for Oliveros's aesthetic grows from the slowly repeating and tapered envelope of the human breath, a shape that the accordion replicates precisely. Studying at the University of Houston and then San Francisco State College, she spent the first phase of her career on the West Coast. In 1957 in San Francisco she began improvising with Terry Riley and Loren Rush when it was unheard of for classically-trained, nonjazz musicians to improvise. From this trio, the art of free improvisation spread to hundreds of other musicians.

Oliveros started out composing in a style of quasi-serial atonal textures. In 1961, however, she abandoned conventional notation in a choral work called *Sound Patterns*, in which the singers cluck their tongues, hiss white noise, and smack their lips in rhythm. (*Sound Patterns* won the Gaudeamus Prize in Europe for best foreign composition; within a couple of years, European composers like Stockhausen and Ligeti were also using similar vocal noises in such pieces as *Momente* and *Aventures*.) As codirector (with Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick) of the San Francisco Tape Music Center from 1961 to 1967, she became one of the first composers to experiment with tape delay, which would later lead to the development of minimalism. Two of the better-known results of her early tape-delay efforts are *Bye Bye Butterfly* (1965), which works an aria fragment from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* into a continuum of sawtooth waves, and *I of IV* (1966), an improvisation in real time (no splicing or overdubbing) with criss-crossing electronic glissandos.

The qualities of *I of IV* can be generalized as characteristic of Oliveros's entire output, whether meditational, improvisatory, electronic, solo, or group-oriented. Her music is slow, sustained, and gradual in its development, like that of early minimalism; yet unlike the minimalists, she allows tension, dissonance, and noise. Every piece by Oliveros can be considered a meditation on sound, and the sounds are more often than not dark, rich, and complex. She was the foremost pioneer in what has become a common genre: the *sound continuum*.

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Pauline Oliveros. Photo © Becky Cohen.

Oliveros has been deeply concerned with the problems women composers face. In an essay published in 1984, "The Contribution of Women Composers," she distinguishes two modes of creativity:

- (1) active, purposive creativity, resulting from cognitive thought, deliberate acting upon or willful shaping of materials, and (2) receptive creativity, during which the artist is like a channel through which material flows and seems to shape itself.⁵

She complains that this society accords value only to the first mode, which is identified with aggression and masculinity. "Artists who are locked into the analytical mode with little or no access to the intuitive mode are apt to produce one-sided works of art. Certainly many of the totally determined, serial works of the post-war years seem to fit that category."⁶ Women's liberation represents, for Oliveros,

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the recognition and re-evaluation of the intuitive mode as being equal to and as essential as the analytical mode for an expression of wholeness in creative work. Oppression of women has also meant devaluation of intuition, which is culturally assigned to women's roles.⁷

And while both analysis and intuition need development in any complete creative artist, the devaluation of intuition has meant that brilliant women composers are not recognized as such because their dominant creative mode is devalued. Those critics who ask "Where are the great women composers?" define their terms in such a way that anyone who manifests the intuitive creative mode more strongly is ineligible.

The problem Oliveros pinpoints here is just as crucial for male artists as it is for women. The mid-twentieth-century exhibited an overwhelming imbalance in favor of analytic creativity, in its preference for twelve-tone music and other idioms characterized by quasi-scientific systems and complicated structures. Only recently has intuition's rightful place in artistic creation been slowly restored. Even so, it remains symptomatic that the classical and academic establishments have clung to analytically-written serialist music and tried to suppress more audience-friendly, intuitive movements such as minimalism and post-minimalism. Oliveros's focus on women's values and contemplation constitute a radical attempt to correct a musical world badly off balance.

A contemplative 1970 work became one of the best known of Oliveros's audience participation pieces: *Meditation on the Points of the Compass*. In this, the listeners sit in a circle, surrounding a chorus and surrounded in turn by eight percussionists. The audience is invited, during the piece, to perform the kind of meditative improvisations Oliveros had been doing herself, humming, buzzing, and whistling long tones. The essence of Oliveros's aesthetic is evident in a series of *Sonic Meditations* she wrote in the seventies, of which No. 1 is titled *Teach Yourself to Fly* (1974):

Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity of the vibrations to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible, naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle. Variation: translate voice to an instrument.

Oliveros has become better known, though, for her solo meditations which she performs singing with accordion. *Horse Sings from Cloud* (1977), for example, is a meditation in long tones sustained the entire length of a breath or an accordion squeeze, the instruction being to "sustain a tone or sound until there is no longer any desire to change it.

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When all desire to change the tone or sounds has subsided, then select a new tone or sound."⁸

In recent years Oliveros has collaborated with Panaiotis and David Gamper on a computer-controlled sound system that can alter the apparent acoustics of a room during a performance. Perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of the system was in the context of a music-theater piece, *Nzinga the Queen King* (1992), based on a story about a sixteenth-century princess of Ndongo (present-day Angola) who took over as king when her father died. Overall, however, Oliveros has not been known so much for specific works as for the steady and intense outpouring of her musico-social activities: making audiences more receptive to and aware of the sensuousness of sound and raising consciousness about what women specifically have to offer through music.

Alvin Lucier

A brilliant conceptualizer of acoustic phenomena, Alvin Lucier is a sculptor of sound, almost more conceptual artist than conventional musician. Born in New Hampshire in 1931, he studied at Yale and Brandeis with Arthur Berger, Irving Fine, and Harold Shapero, and privately with Quincy Porter. As these names suggest, his original style of composing was neoclassic. After two years at Rome on a Fulbright Fellowship, he was hired to teach at Brandeis (from 1962 to 1969), who were under the impression they were gaining a rather conservative composer.

But then, in either 1958 or 1959, Lucier met Cage at Tanglewood. He was walking along the road and Cage, driving past, gave him a ride. The older man asked Lucier what kind of music he wrote, and Lucier, cowed by Cage's avant-gardeness, replied, "My music is way back in the twentieth century." Cage grinned his famous grin and responded, "Our music is timeless."⁹ Soon afterward, in Rome, Lucier wrote a string quartet, *Fragments*, in thorny post-serial style, with glissandos and various noises. No sooner had he been hired at Brandeis than he began evincing Cagean influences in *Action Music for Piano* (1962), a theatrical work that required the pianist to play notes in difficult and unconventional ways (for example, with both knees at once). The first piece, though, that represents the mature Lucier was *Music for a Solo Performer* (1965), in which he attached small electrodes to his scalp in order to amplify the alpha rhythms of his brain—that is, the low-voltage brain wave signal that appears during nonvisualizing phases of mental activity.

In 1970, Lucier took a job at Wesleyan University. Lucier's most famous work appeared in 1971, a tape work called *I Am Sitting in a Room* whose text is virtually self-explanatory:





Alvin Lucier in a realization of his *Music for Solo Performer*, supplying brain waves as input for electronic devices and percussion instruments. Photo by Phil Makanna.

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I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.

This text, read by Lucier, is what one hears at the beginning of *I Am Sitting in a Room*. The tape is then repeated, and each time becomes a little fuzzier, a little hollower with resonance until, by only the fifth repetition, the tunnel-like ringing of the room is more apparent than Lucier's voice. After several more repetitions, the words are no longer intelligible at all, and one listens for the remainder of the work to the sustained frequencies reinforced by the room he recorded in.

I Am Sitting in a Room is very popular, one of the easiest works to use to attract people to listening to music based on acoustic phenomena. The idea that each room contains its own chord, its own sonic fingerprint, so to speak, is a pleasant one, and to hear that fact become audible through clear repetitions (Mimi Johnson calls the piece "Alvin's *Bolero*") is surprising and delightful. The in-joke to the piece, though, is its basis in Lucier's speech, for he was famous for a pronounced stutter that the Sonic Arts Union composers made occasional use of. (On the recording, Lucier stutters over the "r" of the word "rhythm" and the "s" in "smooth.")

All of Lucier's subsequent works have made some hidden but common acoustic phenomenon audible. In *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977), he used an oscillator to vibrate an eighty-foot wire, allowing the movement of air in the space to alter volume, timbre, harmonic structure, rhythm, and cyclic patterning. In several pieces—the most ambitious is *Crossings* (1982–1984), for orchestra—he directed instruments to sustain a series of very soft notes as a sine-wave oscillator slowly swept across the frequency spectrum from 32 to 4,186 cycles per second. As the sine wave approaches each held note, acoustic beats appear which become slower, flatten out at unison, then speed up again and disappear.

In *Music for Piano with One or More Snare Drums* (1990) a pianist plays single notes whose resonant frequencies cause different snare drums surrounding the piano to vibrate unpredictably.

In a way, Lucier's music completes the program begun by John Cage. Where Cage wanted to draw people toward listening to sound as sound, divorced from human intentions or expression, Lucier's music can only be heard as sound to experience it at all. It takes considerable concentration to focus on the acoustic beats in his music, but once one is tuned in, one becomes mesmerized, lost in tracking phenomena that

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cannot be sustained or analyzed. Lucier's performances are usually so delicate that they are at the mercy of hall acoustics, outside noise, and so on. But when they work well, they are among the most meditative and aurally engrossing experiences in contemporary music.

Lucier's impact on younger composers has been so enormous as to have given birth to virtually a separate genre of acoustically-aware electronic music, typified by the work of Ron Kuivila, Nic Collins, and Ben Manley.

James Tenney

When John Cage, who studied with Schoenberg, was asked in 1989 whom he would study with if he were young today, he replied: "James Tenney." Largely hidden from the general public, Tenney has been called (by his student Larry Polansky) "America's most famous unknown composer." In a way he stands at the center of American music, a kind of focal point: he studied and worked with seminal figures such as Varèse, Partch, Ruggles, Cage, Kenneth Gaburo, and Lejaren Hiller; he performed in the ensembles of his contemporaries Philip Glass and Steve Reich; and he has taught some of the leading young composers, including John Luther Adams, Polansky, and Peter Garland. No other composer is so revered by fellow composers, and so unknown to the public at large, as James Tenney.

Born in 1934 in Silver City, New Mexico, Tenney took an engineering scholarship to get into the University of Denver, where he switched over to his first love, music. A phenomenal pianist whose renditions of the *Concord Sonata* are reportedly enlightening, Tenney then went to Juilliard and worked there with Chou Wen-Chung; more importantly, he met Varèse in New York and became a close friend. Juilliard being not to his taste, he switched to Bennington and became friends with Ruggles. Tenney later went to the University of Illinois and worked in Harry Partch's ensemble, but Partch fired him after six months for "arrogance"; apparently Tenney would ask the great man's opinion of various composers and argue with him when he disagreed.¹⁰

A turning point came when Tenney was hired by Bell Laboratories in New Jersey to do psychoacoustic research. In a department run by the pioneering computer musician Max Mathews (for whom see chapter 10), Tenney helped develop sound generating systems, urging the labs to add random generators, envelope generators, and band-pass filters, devices that he had discovered while working with Hiller at Illinois. After this program ended in 1964, he played in the ensembles of Reich and Glass and formed an ensemble called Tone Roads with composer-pianist Phil Corner (b. 1933, a conceptualist-minimalist who later became involved with Balinese gamelan) and the improvising violinist Malcolm Goldstein.

Cage later claimed that, if Feldman hadn't insisted on "a closed group," the Cage-Feldman-Wolff-Brown school would have expanded to include Goldstein, Corner, and Tenney.¹¹

In the seventies Tenney taught at California Institute of the Arts (1970–1975) and the University of California at Santa Cruz (1975–1976), where he had his largest impact on students. His work at Bell Labs had been with large mainframe computers, but at CalArts he found himself in a studio full of analogue synthesizers such as the Moog and Buchla. "I'm not a knob turner," Tenney comments, and he wrote virtually only instrumental music thereafter. In 1976 he accepted a job at York University in Canada, where he has remained ever since.

Tenney's musical output is difficult to characterize as a whole. One thread that has continued throughout his output since his days at Bell Labs is his interest in music as a structural process. Many of his pieces follow some gradual process from beginning to end, a process that may be clearly audible or may take considerable attention to discern. As he puts it,

I conceive of form as not a result of a rhetorical process, not, as Schoenberg described it, as a means for ensuring comprehension, but rather as an object of perception itself.¹²

Sometimes the form can be extremely clear and the process austere, as in *For 12 Strings (Rising)* (1971), where repeated glissandos throughout the

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EXAMPLE 7.1 James Tenney, *Chromatic Canon*.

(Continued)

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entire range of a string orchestra create the illusion of endless upward motion. Elsewhere the process results in various degrees of complexity and clarity, as in *Chromatic Canon* for two pianos (1980–1983), which runs through a slow additive canonic process around a twelve-tone row made up of major and minor triads (example 7.1). As the row is built up note by note, the music is first consonant, then dissonant once the entire row is present, then consonant again at the end. In *Tableaux Vivants* of 1990, Tenney gradually brings about evolutions of melodic contour and tonality within a generally postminimalist tonal language. The resulting textures are lovely and gentle, yet perceptually challenging.

Musical activity in the twentieth century, Tenney feels, became splintered because the resources of harmony were exhausted, and further developments can only be brought about through a move toward microtonality. His *Bridge* for two pianos, eight hands (1984) uses twenty-two pitches per octave in a just-intonation, five-limit system. *The Road to Ubud* for prepared piano and Indonesian gamelan (1986), written after a sabbatical in Indonesia, approximates a Balinese *pelog* scale with a nine-equal-tones-to-the-octave tuning. Works such as *Spectral Canon for Conlon Nancarrow* (1974) and *Critical Band* for the Relache ensemble (1988) slowly unfold the harmonic series like a flower opening up in the ear. The consistency of Tenney's vision and the consistently rigorous quality of his music have created an output of which much remains to be joyously explored.

The musical score consists of two staves, I and II, across three systems. Each system contains two measures. The first system has multi-measure rests of $(x 10 \frac{10}{11})$ and $(x 12)$. The second system has multi-measure rests of $(x 13 \frac{3}{4})$, $(x 15)$, and $(x 17 \frac{1}{7})$. The third system has multi-measure rests of $(x 20)$, $(x 24)$, $(x 30)$, $(x 40)$, and $(x 60)$. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

EXAMPLE 7.1 (continued)

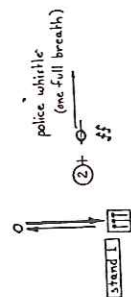
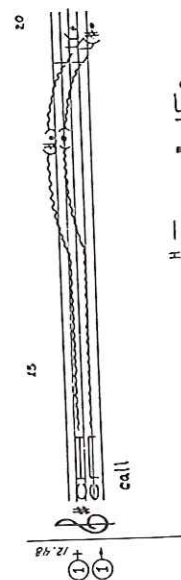
Roger Reynolds

The prime paradigm of a composer whose conceptualism translated to detailed musical scores is Roger Reynolds. Born in Detroit in 1934, Reynolds electrified the music world with the drastically innovative look of his score *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (see example 7.2). The score not only indicates the volume and rhythm of the spoken text (Wallace Stevens's eponymous poem about death), it even shows by position on the page where each performer should stand at any given point; the score's diagonal dotted lines indicate performers walking from one station to another. While Reynolds's later notation became more conventional and has always been quite detailed, much of his notation exhibits innovative approaches to getting the textures he wants.

Reynolds developed in a direction quite antithetical to that of Ashley, Mumma, Behrman, and the other ONCE composers, towards greater and greater abstraction and complexity. One could say that, just as Elliott Carter came from neoclassicism and became Europeanized, Reynolds became Europeanized from the direction of experimentalism, perhaps especially after his residencies at IRCAM (Pierre Boulez's electronic music institute in Paris) in 1981–1982. Like Tenney, Reynolds had first trained as an engineer (at the University of Michigan) before switching to music. In keeping with this split background, Reynolds refers to other disciplines constantly, and his music is the most relentlessly literary of the period. Many of his titles are literary quotations: *Quick Are the Mouths of Earth* (1964–1965) is from Thomas Wolfe; *Ping* (1968) is from Beckett; “. . . from behind the unreasoning mask” (1975) and “. . . the serpent-snapping eye” (1979) are from Melville.

In 1972 Reynolds founded the Center for Musical Experiment at the University of California at San Diego, where he still teaches. On a note-to-note level, his music is full of serial technique, though since the Center added computers in 1978 he has also used frequent computer algorithms. Metaphoric transformation lies at the heart of Reynolds's conception of music. His *Archipelago* for thirty-two instruments and computer sound (1982–1983) became the source work for a number of smaller “island pieces,” such as *Summer Island* for oboe (1984), each of which accompanies an instrument with computer-processed versions of its own timbres. In *Transfigured Wind II* (1983), a concerto for flute, tape, and orchestra from a series of such concertos, computer-altered echoes of the flute lines waft through the orchestra like a ghost flute chorus. *Whispers Out of Time* for string quartet and string orchestra (1989, its title from a John Ashbery poem) transforms quotations from Beethoven and Mahler in curved slow motion, as if in a convex mirror. Reynolds's magnum opus to date is a 75-minute opera, *Odyssey* (1989–1993).

Reynolds could be thought of as America's closest parallel to Pierre Boulez. Both use serial techniques to create transparent textures of sta-



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The score is divided into two main sections, with measures 1-15 on the left and 16-20 on the right. The piano part (Piano) features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as *ff*, *pp*, and *mp*. The percussion part (Percussion) includes instructions for 'rim shots', 'SD' (snare drum), and 'Timp.' (timpani). The vocal part (Vocal) includes lyrics like 'THE MUSCULAR ONE' and 'YOU ARE ONE' with specific phrasing and dynamics. Performance instructions include 'hand clusters, on keyboard, black and white keys, as fast as possible', 'fire-cracker in SOD (or amp-gun, etc)', and 'begin inflating balloon, and continue until it bursts'. The score also includes a 'Piano' part with 'finger' and 'palm' markings, and a 'Director cues' section with 'shoot with cupped hands' and 'call the roller of big cigars'. The title 'THE EMPEROR OF ICE CREAM' is prominently displayed at the bottom of the score.

EXAMPLE 7.2 Roger Reynolds, *The Emperor of Ice Cream*.

sis and flurried gestures; both derive music from literary associations; each founded an experimental music center; and each wrote an early theoretical book—Boulez's *On Music Today* (1963) and Reynolds's *Mind Models* (1975)—outlining musical possibilities in what seemed at the time an unlimited high-tech future. The main differences are that Boulez shied away from electronics in his own music while Reynolds has welcomed it with open arms, and Reynolds has been tremendously more prolific. It is a telling detail of Reynolds's career that he became, in 1989, the first composer since Ives from an experimentalist background to win the normally conservative Pulitzer Prize for music.

Fluxus

One of the more stunning phenomena of the sixties was a movement of artists from across several disciplines who became grouped together under the name Fluxus. The movement was the invention of George Maciunas (1931–1978), a graphic artist from Lithuania who came to New York in 1948. He opened a gallery in 1960 and within a few months met La Monte Young (who will be discussed more fully in chapter 8) and Richard Maxfield, two composers who shared Maciunas's interest in the ideas of John Cage. The same year, Young and Maxfield curated a concert series at the downtown Manhattan loft of a Japanese failed concert pianist named Yoko Ono (b. 1933 in Tokyo), who was at the time married to Toshi Ichiyanagi (b. 1933 in Kobe), a pianist and protégé of Cage. Once Young, Maxfield, Ono and several other artists began to form a group identity, Maciunas crystallized the movement by giving it a name: Fluxus, with connotations of impermanence and variability. Some saw the naming as a transparent marketing ploy, but if so, it worked beautifully. Dozens of artists worked under the Fluxus imprimatur, and many of them are remembered today only for that association.

Quite self-consciously, Fluxus was a resurgence of Dada, the French and German art movement of the 1920s that had reacted to the horror of World War I by plunging into nihilism and meaninglessness with often hilarious aplomb. Like Dada, Fluxus was an anti-art art movement, a violent renunciation of the art world's elitist claims to profundity and expertise. Maciunas summed this up clearly in a 1965 manifesto:

FLUXMANIFESTO ON FLUXAMUSEMENT—VAUDEVILLE-ART? TO ESTABLISH ARTISTS NONPROFESSIONAL, NONPARASITIC, NONELITE STATUS IN SOCIETY, HE MUST DEMONSTRATE OWN DISPENSABILITY, HE MUST DEMONSTRATE SELFSUFFICIENCY OF THE AUDIENCE, HE MUST DEMONSTRATE THAT ANYTHING CAN SUBSTITUTE ART AND ANYONE CAN DO IT. THEREFORE THIS SUBSTITUTE ART-AMUSEMENT MUST BE SIMPLE, AMUSING, CONCERNED WITH INSIGNIFICANCES, HAVE NO COMMODITY OR

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INSTITUTIONAL VALUE. IT MUST BE UNLIMITED, OBTAINABLE BY ALL AND EVENTUALLY PRODUCED BY ALL. THE ARTIST DOING ART MEANWHILE, TO JUSTIFY HIS INCOME, MUST DEMONSTRATE THAT ONLY HE CAN DO ART. ART THEREFORE MUST APPEAR TO BE COMPLEX, INTELLECTUAL, EXCLUSIVE, INDISPENSABLE, INSPIRED. TO RAISE ITS COMMODITY VALUE IT IS MADE TO BE RARE, LIMITED IN QUANTITY AND THEREFORE ACCESSIBLE NOT TO THE MASSES BUT TO THE SOCIAL ELITE.¹³

Fluxus events and artifacts, then, tended to be little slices of life, actions or objects that one wouldn't ordinarily view with an aesthetic interest, though usually these were twisted into gags, puns, and wry paradoxes.

The movement was international, since Maciunas was curating exhibits in Germany from the earliest years. Many of the music or theater pieces—a distinction was rarely possible—were realizations of brief text instructions, what Young called “short forms,” and effective performances depended on following the instructions in a clever, unexpected way. For example, George Brecht's (b. 1926) *Drip Music* simply states, “A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel.” In *Distance for Piano*, by Takehisa Kosugi (b. 1938 in Tokyo), the pianist (originally David Tudor) is separated from the piano by a number of obstacles, and is tasked to make sounds on the piano from a fixed distance. In her *Song No. 1, “Onion Skin”* (1972), Alison Knowles (b. 1933) pressed bits of onion skin between cellophone wrap, placed them over musical staves, and asked a pianist to perform them.

Occasionally preparations would be more elaborate. In George Brecht's *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*, drivers sit in their cars and follow directions written on instruction cards, including honking horns, turning headlights off and on, opening and closing doors, and so on. Young's *Poem for Chairs, Tables, and Benches, Etc., or Other Sound Sources* (1960) sets up a random time scheme within which sounds are to be made by dragging, scraping, and pushing the objects named. One of the most elegantly poetic Fluxus works is Benjamin Patterson's *A Dozen for Carmen* (1990): as a recording of Bizet's *Carmen* plays, a dozen performers enter, each dropping a red rose into a blender half-full of water. After the last rose is added, Patterson turns on the blender, pours the liquidated flowers into a glass, and, after a skeptical look, drinks them.

Quite quickly, Fluxus pieces turned toward the whimsically non-performable, the absurd, the irredeemably conceptual. Young's *Piano Piece for David Tudor #3* reads only, “most of them were very old grasshoppers.” His *Piano Piece for David Tudor #1* gave the instruction,

Bring a bale of hay and a bucket of water onto the stage for the piano to eat and drink. The performer may then feed the piano or leave it to eat by itself. If the former, the piece is over after the piano has been fed. If the latter, it is over after the piano eats or decides not to.

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Tudor got off easy; the instruction for *Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1* requires him to push the piano through a wall. And some Fluxus pieces that have been performed were probably allowed against the presenters' better judgment; a case in point being *Trace for Orchestra* (ca. 1963) by Robert Watts, in which an orchestra sets fire to their music.

If Young tended toward whimsicality, other Fluxus artists tended toward violence and danger, the master of this mode being Nam June Paik (b. 1932 in Seoul, Korea), who saw the future in television and later took up a career in video installations. Besides cutting off several neckties, on John Cage and off, in *One for Violin* (1961) he slowly and menacingly, over a period of several minutes, raised a violin over his head, finally ending the suspense by indeed smashing it on a table. Paik was also one of Fluxus's main advocates for sex in art; in 1967, the cellist Charlotte Moorman was arrested for indecent exposure in the middle of performing Paik's *Opera Sextronique*, playing cello with her bare breasts covered only by two of Paik's small TV screens. Dick Higgins (b. 1938 in Cambridge, England) created an orchestral score by attaching sheets of blank manuscript paper to a board and having a friend fire bullets into them.

Fluxus purists (if that is not an oxymoron) feel that the movement died with Maciunas in 1978, if not a few years earlier; others feel that the spirit of Fluxus is as unquenchable as it is undefinable. Besides providing a near-endless supply of anecdotes, Fluxus performances often proved that, once pretensions are kicked out the door, beauty often slips in the window.

Source Magazine and Other Conceptualists

The spirit of sixties music is preserved nowhere better than in *Source* magazine, a bulky, anything-goes journal that was published and edited by Larry Austin and Stanley Lunetta. It ran to only eleven issues, from 1966 to 1974, but included at least a dozen composers in each volume, and the names include virtually all of the era's most radical musicians. Few pages contained anything recognizable as musical notation: there are charts of dots and dashes, wild scribbblings, cartoons, electrical circuit diagrams, photographs, clear acetates marked with inscrutable graphics, even patches of fur glued to the pages, and in each issue a ten-inch vinyl recording of two or more of the pieces discussed. If it is difficult to look through *Source* and figure out what the composers actually did, the picture it provides is probably an accurate one.

The guiding force behind *Source*, Larry Austin, was and is a tireless inventor of abstract but lively music systems, born in Oklahoma in 1930. Like so many of the conceptualists, he was identified for years with one early work: *Accidents* (1967), in which the pianist is required to play fast



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Annea Lockwood.

and violent gestures and forearm clusters, but depressing the keys silently so as not to make a sound. In other words, if the pianist succeeds, the piece is silent, and the only sounds are accidental. Sea-shell wind chimes are placed on the piano strings and amplified with contact microphones, so that the pianist's slightest mistakes will be heard through loudspeakers. On the faculty at North Texas State University since 1978, Austin has based works on the sketches of Charles Ives's *Universe Symphony*, and his aesthetic shares Ives's transcendent beauty of naturally

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generated, calm complexity. An example is *Canadian Coastlines* (1981), an eight-part canon at eight different tempos for instruments and computer-sequenced tape, its lines based on a mapping of Canada's coastlines by means of mathematical fractals.¹⁴

Few artists made a more dashing appearance in *Source* than Annea Lockwood, who was born in New Zealand in 1939 and whose burning piano made the cover of Volume 9. After a period of study in Europe (1961–1973), she came to New York, where she has taught at Vassar ever since. The instructions to her *Piano Burning* (1968) direct the performer (arsonist?) to “overtune the strings as high as possible so as to get maximum sound when they snap with the heat. Cover two . . . microphones with asbestos and fasten inside of piano. . . . Splash small amount of kerosene on back of the piano. . . .” Balloons and firecrackers are listed as optional accoutrements. In another 1972 performance, *Piano Drowning*, Lockwood rolled an upright piano into a cow pond near Amarillo, Texas, where it is presumably still sinking.

However, Lockwood subsequently mellowed out as the era did, and most of her works are meditative, compassionate, universal in their empathy. Her most arresting early work is a tape piece called *Tiger Balm* (1970), which begins with a highly amplified cat's purr and continues with heartbeats and muffled bell tones in a lovely, meditative continuum. For *Delta Run* (1981), Lockwood interviewed a sculptor dying of throat cancer only hours before he died, and used the interview as background for a quiet theater piece about completing the circle of life. To create her *Sound Map of Hudson River* (1982), a symphony of rushing liquid in various speeds and densities, Lockwood recorded the water at different points along the Hudson River. More recently she has turned to ensemble works, the most ambitious and beautiful being her *Thousand-Year Dreaming* (1990): a haunting, primitive tone poem inspired by Paleolithic cave paintings and framed by four pulsing didgeridoos played by performers moving around the hall.

One of the strangest figures to haunt the pages of *Source* didn't emerge as a major influence until the 1990s. Jerry Hunt (1943–1993) was a thin, angular, nonstop talker who kept up his tremendous energy by imbibing enormous quantities of coffee. He lived in a barn some miles outside Dallas, Texas, and his performances were entertaining but inexplicable. His equipment, which could fill an entire stage, consisted of video machines, dozens of wires, board after board of electronic circuitry, electronic keyboards, toys, amulets, even suitcases. As he hit things with sticks, waved wands, and played the keyboard with sound-producing devices on his wrists, these machinations would somehow trigger changes in the electronic sound and video displays.

Hunt grew up fascinated by the mysteries of religion. At the age of thirteen, he started his own church, sending out literature and asking for donations. His parents discovered what was going on and put a tempo-

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rary stop to Hunt's evangelism when two devotees traced his address and showed up asking to see "The Master." Hunt's ambiguous interest in religion survived in his music-video performances. His aim, he said, was to allow enough perceptible correspondences between his actions on stage and the video-aural results to reinforce the faith of those who believed there was some connection, but not enough to convince skeptics. He also used in his works the angelic alphabet of the sixteenth-century magus John Dee, who supposedly spoke with angels through his shyster-skryer Edward Kelley. *Lattice (stream): ordinal* (1991) is an example of Hunt's incredibly manic piano style, which involved a complex notation for uneven tremolos with simultaneous crescendos and decrescendos. The end of Hunt's life seemed of a piece with the rest of it. Incurably ill from cancer, he took his death into his own hands, rigging up an apparatus from which he breathed carbon monoxide.

Little known to the public but admired by younger composers, Dary John Mizelle (born 1940 in Oklahoma) combines the earthy sensuousness of Lockwood's music with the conceptualist complexity of Austin's. Mizelle plays the *shakuhachi*, a Japanese wooden flute, and much of his music is for percussion ensemble, structured around theories he derived from working with Stockhausen in the sixties. Although the perceptual parameters of the music are often arranged along simple lines—growth versus decay, metal percussion versus skin, free rhythm versus cycles and cross-rhythms—the actual working out in a piece such as *Soundscape* (1976) can be extremely complex. Many pieces, including the mammoth *Lake Mountain Thunder* for English horn and percussion ensemble (1981), are proportioned in accordance with a mystical mathematical formula that Mizelle found in a book on the ancient Egyptian pyramids:

$$\pi = \frac{6}{5} \times \phi^2$$

or

$$\pi = \frac{6}{5} \text{ times } \phi^2$$

pi being, of course, the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, phi being the golden section: 1.618. . . . Pi might equal the whole duration of a work, for example, and important structural points be marked off by ratios of phi and rhythms of five-against-six. There is an other-worldly quality to Mizelle's music, primitive in sound, meditative in shape, yet intricate, as though it were made from scratch by a shipwreck victim stranded on a lush, tropical island.

Alvin Curran is quite opposite: suave and sophisticated with fluent jazz piano chops. Born in Providence in 1938 and a student of Elliott Carter and Mel Powell at Yale, he is best known as the expatriate keyboardist of the Italian live-electronics ensemble *Musica Elettronica Viva*, which he founded in Rome in 1965 with Richard Teitelbaum and

Frédéric Rzewski. However, he relocated to America in the late eighties. His early work, such as *Song and Views from the Magnetic Garden* (1973–1975) combined electronic tape with live voice and occasional instruments in quiet, meditative soundscapes. His magnum opus is probably *Crystal Psalms* (1988), a radio collage for the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi *Kristallnacht* pogrom, incorporating tapes of the sounds of Jewish life (a shofar ram's horn, Yemenite Jews praying at the Wailing Wall, his father singing Yiddish) along with six ensembles; with its Jewish chants juxtaposed with crashes of shattering glass, the piece is chilling. He is also known for conventionally notated works such as *For Cornelius* (1981), a chromatic slow waltz for piano with a near-minimalist middle section of angry tremolos.

Another superb pianist who improvises in his conceptual pieces is “Blue” Gene Tyranny, creator of some of the musical characterizations in Ashley’s operas. Born Robert Sheff in San Antonio in 1945, he and a fellow composer Philip Krumm started their own new-music scene in their home town. Juilliard tried to entice Tyranny, but, repelled by the stifling atmosphere, he headed instead for Ann Arbor and became part of the ONCE group, later moving to Mills College and finally New York. Tyranny’s germinal work is *Country Boy Country Dog* (1967), a conceptual piece which has given birth to many quite disparate realizations. He has a way, in pieces like *We All Watch the Sun and the Moon (For a Moment of Insight)*, of taking a single page of abstractly notated harmonies and expanding it into ethereal textures of ostinatos, circuitous arpeggios, melodies reharmonized over and over. His downtown-style “opera” *The Driver’s Son* (1990–1993) uses a somewhat Ashley-esque vocal technique and is tangentially about Benjamin Franklin, or at least about electricity. Few conceptualists have the ability to create such sensuous beauty from such abstract concepts.

Originally a member of the Sonic Arts Union, David Behrman (born 1937 in Salzburg, Austria) has specialized in interactive computer systems that respond to live performers. He studied with Riegger, Piston, Henri Pousseur, and Stockhausen before becoming codirector of the Mills College Center for Contemporary Music; he later moved to New York. His first electronic improvisation work was *Runthrough* (1967), a setup of inexpensive circuitry (sound generators, modulators, and photoelectric cells) on which three or four people perform by turning knobs and shining flashlights. Behrman’s pieces give the impression of being “verbs” rather than “nouns”; that is, the identity of each piece emerges from the process of performing it as a set of possibilities, rather than as a structure that will recur with each performance. Within such freedom, the music nevertheless has its own distinct personality, mellow, ambient, and timbrally exotic. In *Unforeseen Events*, the trumpeter (and composer) Ben Neill first plays nine pitches, which the computer will then use as a kind of harmonic “spine”; henceforth only those pitches will trigger

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changes in the synthesizer. Behrman has recently built a text work, *My Dear Siegfried*, . . . (1996), around letters exchanged between his father, the playwright S. N. Behrman, and Siegfried Sassoon during the First World War.

The fourth member of the Sonic Arts Union, Gordon Mumma (born 1935 in Framingham, Massachusetts) was also a cofounder of the ONCE festivals. Along with Behrman and Tudor, he was one of the pioneers of live electronics, designing circuitry that would assist in compositional design through electronic and later computer logic. His best-known early work is *Hornpipe* (1967), in which a French horn player (Mumma) plays into what's termed a cybersonic console, a kind of analog computer which modifies the sound of the horn in ways that are triggered by the horn itself.¹⁵ At first one hears the natural horn sound, then the sounds become more and more raspily electronic. Many of Mumma's early pieces involved multimedia and were quite theatrical, notably *Megaton for William Burroughs* (1963), in which the performers surrounded the audience, communicating via headphones like members of a bomber crew, as quotations from old British World War II movies slowly seeped through the electronic texture. In the eighties, Mumma began to use computers, as in *Than Particle* (1985) for percussion and digitally synthesized percussion. Since 1986, however, he has mostly written chamber and solo instrumental music, such as *Piano Sets* (1986–1996).

In addition to *Source* magazine and the ONCE festivals, the University of Illinois in the sixties and early seventies was an exciting musical world full of faculty—Ben Johnston, Salvatore Martirano, Kenneth Gaburo, Lejaren Hiller, Herbert Brün—and students whose interests included jazz, serialism, Cage, open form, graphic scores, theater, sound poetry, and anything else that might come up. No one blended jazz, serial techniques, and electronics with less regard for boundaries than Salvatore Martirano (1927–1995, born in Yonkers, New York). A student of Bernard Rogers at Eastman and later of the Italian twelve-tone composer Luigi Dallapiccola in Florence, his eclecticism first became evident in *O, O, O, That Shakespeherian Rag* (1958), a serialist choral setting of passages from Shakespeare's plays with a chamber orchestra that includes a jazz ensemble.

The piece that made Martirano notorious was *LsGA* (1967–1968), a classic sixties theater piece requiring three movie projectors and two-channel tape. In *LsGA*, an actor wearing a gas mask recites Lincoln's Gettysburg Address while breathing helium, resulting in a surreally high-pitched squeal. The earnestness of Lincoln's text is further subverted by films mixing occasionally obscene images of war and sex (such as toy tanks driving along a nude woman's body), while deafening noises play in the background. The piece concludes with Muzak in a postholocaust world, as a Ronald-Reaganesque spokesman insists nothing is

wrong. From the late seventies on, Martirano became almost exclusively involved with his invention, the Sal-Mar Construction, an electronic machine that could perform along with an instrumentalist, responding to, altering, and interrupting his or her sounds; with it he made pieces such as *Robot* and *Sampler: everything goes when the whistle blows*.

It is symptomatic of that Midwest scene that Stuart Saunders Smith calls himself a jazz musician, though the sound of his music has much in common with twelve-tone music, and his scores are often charts of enigmatic symbols. Born in Portland, Maine, in 1948, he studied with Brün, Martirano, and Johnston at Illinois and teaches at the University of Maryland at Baltimore. He often composes in words chosen for their sonic values; his solo opera *By Language Embellished: I* (1983–1984) contains passages like:

Hush the Cull Snivet.
Hush the Cull Snivet.
Carburetor cuts off air
and Clog-hinder-stroke
baffles the exhaust.
Silent flute
Fired sleeper's nostrils!

While jazz lies at the heart of his aesthetic, he has also, since 1971, composed mobiles, structures in which the musical content could be reordered by the performers. His *Notebook* for any musicians (1980) uses melodies derived from famous jazz tunes within a mobile form. *Return and Recall* (1976–1977) is a set of grids filled with circles, letters, numbers and arrows to be interpreted according to elaborate rules in an exercise in group composition. The format of Smith's music is often political in intent; his *Songs I–IX* (1981) is a mini-opera in which the actor-singer-percussionist performs with spoons, bowls, a jug of water, frying pans, and a similarly "poverty-stricken" array of instruments as an ecological protest against the exorbitant means required by conventional opera. Other works, like *Pinetop* for piano (1976–1977) are notated with a complexity meant to preserve the spontaneity of jazz.

Two figures were especially well loved on the West Coast as teachers, though their music has not had much recent impact: Kenneth Gaburo and Robert Erickson. Gaburo (1926–1993) pioneered electronic collage and a fusion of composition with linguistics; he ran interdisciplinary workshops and quit teaching at San Diego to run the experimental Lingua Press. His most ambitious essay in speech music was *Maledetto* (1976) for seven "virtuoso speakers" who theatrically recite texts exploring all possible connotations—some learned, others obscene—of the word "screw." Erickson (b. 1917), who taught at San Diego from 1966 on, abandoned twelve-tone writing to take up a fanatical interest in timbre, including that of taped natural sounds. Most characteristic of this

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interest is *Pacific Sirens* (1969), in which an instrumental ensemble accompanies a tape of the California surf which has been filtered to emphasize various pitches.

Perhaps it was Petr Kotik who, more than almost anyone else, absorbed Cage's methods into the act of composition, and with idiosyncratic results. Though born in Prague in 1942, he came under Cage's spell early, and came to America in 1969; soon afterward the Russians invaded Prague, making a return disadvantageous, so he formed the S.E.M. Ensemble and moved it to New York in 1983. In 1971, Kotik discovered a box, being thrown away, of graphs that charted the results of experiments measuring the reaction times of rats to ingested alcohol. Pleased with the gently undulating shapes, Kotik used these graphs as the basis of several major works up through 1982: including *There Is Singularly Nothing* (1971/1973), *John Mary* (1973–1974), and his early magnum opus, *Many Many Women* (1975–1978), all based on texts by Gertrude Stein. The most distinctive aspect of Kotik's music is the parallel fourths and fifths he uses as harmony. In more recent works such as *Wilsie Bridge* (1986–1987) and *Quiescent Form* (1995), he has added vibrant percussion to his music, tambourines, cowbells, cymbals and such. If Kotik's methods are eccentric, his music possesses a peculiar beauty, like Gregorian chant randomly sung by monks in different keys, sometimes with a hot rhythmic background.

Improvisation and the New Virtuosity

One of the most pervasive currents of the seventies was a new fascination with instrumental virtuosity, a new approach to musical instruments that considered them as physical objects to be used in every way imaginable, rather than simply as producers of musical tone. A choir of composer-virtuosos sprang up: Joseph Celli on the oboe, Malcolm Goldstein on the violin, Joan LaBarbara and David Moss on voice, Stuart Dempster on trombone, Bertram Turetzky on double bass, and Harvey Sollberger and Robert Dick on flute. Celli (born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1944) often writes works for a solo instrument combined with multiples of itself on tape or video; for example, *Sky: S for J* for quintuple English horns (1976) and *Video Sax* for saxophones of all sizes with the five nonlive instruments played via video (1993). Celli's music is marked by resonant sonic images pursued with relentless, almost minimalist intensity. When improvising, he often takes apart the oboe and performs on just the reed, the mouthpiece, and so on, and has won by so doing an active place in the free improvisation scene that sprouted up in the 1980s.

Malcolm Goldstein (born in Brooklyn in 1936), codirected the Tone Roads series with Tenney and Corner and improvised with Celli and Moss. Because of the decidedly nonurban nature of his personality,

he moved to rural Vermont in the early seventies, and his music has become concerned with the sounds and aesthetics of nature and natural environments. His violin improvisations, called *Soundings*, emphasize rough, scratchy, breathy tones on the violin, and his unconventional scores take advantage of his skills as a calligrapher. *The Fragility of Line* (1982), for example, consists of horizontal penned lines whose uneven thickness is to be reflected in terms of bow and finger pressure. Some of Goldstein's best works, though, are for large ensemble; his *The Seasons: Vermont* (1980–1982) surrounds the audience with a large array of percussion, which is deployed in textures of delicate chaos.

The other performer-composers listed here have been heavily involved with improvisation, but Joan LaBarbara (born 1947 in Philadelphia) has more often sung with a prerecorded tape background. Singing in the ensembles of Steve Reich and Philip Glass in the seventies, she began to develop her own repertoire of vocal effects—trills, whispers, cries, sighs, inhaled tones, and multiphonics (singing more than one pitch at a time)—and wrote her own pieces to exploit them. The taped backgrounds of her “sound paintings” consist mostly of her own voice, with occasionally a percussion instrument or synthesized timbre, with which she blends in sometimes illusionistic ways. She has remained active in performing other composers' music; Feldman wrote his *Three Voices* for her, and Ashley wrote her the lead role in his opera *Now Eleanor's Idea*.

Finally, if an era can be summed up better in satire than description, the conceptualist sixties and seventies can have no better epitaph than the multimedia theater works of the duo [THE], which consists of the trumpeter Edwin Harkins and the vocalist Philip Larson. Both on the faculty of the University of California at San Diego, the pair specialize in precisely choreographed works that spoof conceptualist conventions. With astonishing comic timing, they throw pencils at each other, explicate meaningless complex diagrams, show films of themselves playing golf on craggy mountains, dip ringing finger cymbals in teacups of water to supposedly alter the pitch, shout nonsense syllables in perfect unison, and justify the whole mess with pseudoscientific statements. If the conceptualist era sometimes degenerated into absurdity, [THE] has taken exquisite revenge on its excesses.

Notes

1. Will Johnson, “First Festival of Live-Electronic Music 1967,” in *Source*, Issue Number 3, p. 54.
2. Quoted in Kyle Gann, “Shouting at the Dead,” *Village Voice*, October 8, 1991, pp. 89–90.

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3. Robert Ashley, *Perfect Lives: An Opera* (New York: Archer Fields and Burning Books, 1991), pp. 5–6.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–72.
5. Pauline Oliveros, "The Contribution of Women Composers," in *Software for People* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1984); p. 132.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.
8. Liner notes, Pauline Oliveros, *Accordion & Voice*, Lovely Music VR 1901.
9. Interview with the author, July, 1996.
10. Interview with the author, September 19, 1996.
11. Quoted in William Duckworth, *Talking Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), p. 16.
12. Interview with the author, September 26, 1996.
13. Quoted in Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988), p. 133.
14. Quoted in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio, included on *The Composer in the Computer Age IV: A Larry Austin Retrospective: 1967–94*, Centaur CRC 2219.
15. I am indebted for this characterization to Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, p. 86.

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