

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

MUSIC IN THE WESTERN WORLD

A History in Documents

PIERO WEISS

*Peabody Conservatory of Music
Johns Hopkins University*

RICHARD TARUSKIN

University of California at Berkeley

THOMSON


SCHIRMER

AUSTRALIA • BRAZIL • CANADA • MEXICO • SINGAPORE • SPAIN
UNITED KINGDOM • UNITED STATES

When music doesn't deal with subjects and treatments, as in my music, which is often a process where the musical material and its evolution becomes part and parcel of the structure of the music, then you don't have the psychological access to the music that I described earlier. That's why we don't hear the music as narrative or as a model of colloquial time. What we're hearing then is music in another time system. Now, we have a lot of experiences in our lives that take place in non-colloquial time systems. Some of them happen to be drug experiences; some are religious experiences; some are nature experiences. So when people say to me that music is druggy or trancey or this or that, I think they're confused; they're confusing a variety of experiences that share in common their difference from ordinary life.

Q: *But non-ordinary time can't be completely dramatic.*

A: No, but even *Einstein* works toward a finale; you can't miss it. I remember when I was talking about the last act, the Spaceship, with Bob [Wilson], I said, "Look, Bob, I think I'm going to write a real finale; a real razzle-dazzle finale." I wanted to see how he felt about it, and he said, "Fine," he liked the idea. With *Einstein*, I decided that I would try to write a piece that left the audience standing, and I've almost never played that music without seeing everyone leave his seat; it's the strangest thing, almost biological. In fact, sometimes I've done concerts where I've played the Spaceship, and then as an encore played the last part of the Spaceship, and the same thing happens again.

Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), 214-16.

164

Fusion

One of the most distinctive features of minimalism was the degree to which its procedures reflected those of non-European music. (In Reich's case, the influences came from Africa and Indonesia; in Glass's, from India.) This influence was no mere matter of allusion or thematic window-dressing (what Reich sneeringly called "Chinoiserie"). The Western component was no longer the unquestioned structural basis. A mutual accommodation of cultures on grounds so much nearer equal than before reflected a general tendency toward multiculturalism in American society, replacing the older ideal of the melting pot, which had emphasized homogeneity over variety. As a political issue it was highly contentious; in the domain of art and entertainment it was less unprecedented. There had been a significant fusionist streak in American music for many decades, especially among composers reared on the West Coast, where the Asian presence was strong. One of the most conspicuous musical multiculturalists was Lou Harrison (1917-2003), a composer who was born in Oregon and raised in California. In the interview excerpted below, when Harrison speaks of "different pitches," he means pitches outside the even-tempered scale, for which he harbored a righteous aversion. In his *Concerto for Piano and Gamelan* (1987), for example, the piano was tuned to match the gamelan, not the other way round.

The encounter with the other Atlantica, I was in New York learned a lot. I did get a gre I came back. I am part of Pacific So I have that to draw from concern in the East Coast because Stravinsky solved it was to go assume you are American and the Pacific basin. When I tea There were four or five major which is only a peninsula of A do the Chinese tradition, incl Asia, predominantly gamelan in several of its aspects. And th then I would do American In

When I had the opportu Why I liked gamelan was tha tradition of Javanese gamelan and I'm not going to—I'm ju of it nonetheless and I can te you know, a Javanese soundi I studied several instruments

In my own composition unless it can play different pi gamelan tuning, then fine, o gamelan with a Western or pitches as a gamelan orchestr

When I taught the worl with at least a good introduc they studied Confucius and F thing. When we were in Ind Islam, I made an introduction in the music, and so that's w

Q: *Right, because it provi lines, in my own work a study various aspects of*

A: Well, what you're doi thing can be done with

Q: *Right—well, that's pre boundary in dealing w geographical boundari mental differences?*

A: Oh, I think they're b another can do I can t

Maria Cizmic, "Composing the P Musicology Department), I, no. 1

The encounter with the other, no matter what it is, is productive. I had a chance at Atlantica, I was in New York for ten years and heard the European repertoire and learned a lot. I did get a great deal of education in New York about Atlantica, but I came back. I am part of Pacifica and as I point out my origins are in the Pacific region. So I have that to draw from and still do. The problem actually, I think, is of graver concern in the East Coast because of the Atlantic connection. The way Schoenberg and Stravinsky solved it was to go to the past of Europe, their own place, whereas here you assume you are American and are fascinated by Japan and Java and China and all around the Pacific basin. When I teach a world music course I teach only the classic music. There were four or five major categories, and they were all Asian nations, even Europe which is only a peninsula of Asia. I didn't do much of the European tradition, but I did do the Chinese tradition, including the Japanese and Korean, and I did do Southeast Asia, predominantly gamelan, and then the Hindu tradition, and the Islamic tradition in several of its aspects. And then, if I had time in class, if I managed to get all that done, then I would do American Indian music, and that brought it around the circle.

When I had the opportunity to study gamelan music, I plunged full speed into it. Why I liked gamelan was that it sounded the way it did traditionally. So I learned the tradition of Javanese gamelan and also a little Sundanese gamelan. I haven't done Bali and I'm not going to—I'm just too old to do anything more. But I'm interested in some of it nonetheless and I can teach Javanese gamelan, the entire orchestra, and produce, you know, a Javanese sounding performance. And Chinese music, when I took that up, I studied several instruments and played them in concerts all over the place.

In my own compositions I never combine a Western instrument with Asian ones unless it can play different pitches, and if it can play pitches that can correspond with gamelan tuning, then fine, otherwise I let it be. I wouldn't dream about combining a gamelan with a Western orchestra because a Western orchestra can't play the same pitches as a gamelan orchestra.

When I taught the world music class, I did approach each of the major sections with at least a good introduction to the ethnic culture of that section. That is to say that they studied Confucius and Buddhism when we were in the Chinese/Japanese/Korean thing. When we were in Indian or Indo they studied a little bit about things like that; Islam, I made an introduction to Islamic thought, and so on. Because it is also reflected in the music, and so that's what I did.

Q: *Right, because it provides a context for what is happening musically. Along these lines, in my own work as a musicologist, I occasionally cross historical boundaries to study various aspects of European and ...*

A: Well, what you're doing is studying the music of Northwest Asia, and the same thing can be done with Javanese music, or Chinese music.

Q: *Right—well, that's pretty much my question: do you find that crossing a historical boundary in dealing with musics of the past is somehow basically the same as crossing geographical boundaries to study the musics of varying regions, or are there fundamental differences?*

A: Oh, I think they're basically the same. Fundamentally we're all humans, what another can do I can try to do. I think it's about the same idea.

Maria Cizmici, "Composing the Pacific: Interviews with Lou Harrison," *Echo* (online journal of the UCLA Musicology Department), I, no. 1 (1999).