

Musicology and the Present
April 20, 2013
Lewis & Clark, Portland

9 am Registration opens

9:30 am Session I: Spaces, Places, and Modes of Presentation

Katherine Preston, College of William and Mary

Stretching the Ears of American Audiences:

The Use of Contemporary Music Techniques by Composers of Film Music

Consideration of film music in a conference devoted to “the realities of contemporary concert music” allows us to confront two different stereotypes: first, that film music composers are not ‘real’ composers; second, that most 21st-century Americans are unfamiliar with the sounds of contemporary art music. The first bias has been discredited, in part by scholars who now evaluate this music appropriately: not as concert music, but rather as an important part of a synergistic combination of visuals and sound. Good music written for such collaborative ventures is no less “contemporary” or valid than is music intended for concert performance. The second bias, which is more intriguing, is the primary the focus of my paper. A vast majority of Americans who encounter orchestral music today do so not in a concert hall, but rather in a cinema; much of the music that they hear is stylistically of the nineteenth century. I would argue, however, that some of these viewers have also been exposed to important contemporary “art music” techniques. The most obvious examples are the minimalist scores by Philip Glass—not just those for the experimental “qatsi” films of the 1980s, but also for such mainstream efforts as *The Hours* (2002). Less obvious is the adoption by some film composers of the overtly “art music” idea that all sound is musical material. Some composers, for example, deliberately create moments when music and non-musical sounds intertwine; this both blurs diegetic/non-diegetic boundaries and contributes to the “total sound plane” characteristic of some contemporary cinema. Examples include Thomas Newman’s score for *The Player* (1992) and Dario Marianelli’s for *Atonement* (2007). That these techniques have been adopted by some film music composers indicates an unanticipated level of functional application. More important, however, is the suggestion that one need not attend contemporary concerts in order to be exposed to the sounds and aesthetics of contemporary art music.

Nate Sloan, Stanford University

"Classical Revolution" and the New Urban Geography

"Classical Revolution"—an organization begun in San Francisco in 2006, now with chapters across the U.S.—has a name that suggests musical insurrection against the classical old guard, a composers' collective modeled after Edgar Varèse, perhaps, or a splinter cell of disgruntled subscription holders picketing for more Schnittke in their Philharmonic. In fact, Classical Revolution has no qualms over playing the Viennese masters. Their radicalism lies not in the realm of programming, but of space. The group's mission is simple: "to bring live chamber music to our neighborhoods, making it an open, accessible, and fun musical experience for the community." Really, the "revolution" in their title is a holdover from the Revolution Cafe, the Mission District bar where the group first started playing, but its more radical meaning is not

inappropriate. Classical music performed outside the aegis of the concert hall, or other "sanctioned" settings (i.e. academies, museums, mansions), has traditionally been met with suspicion by the musical establishment. Classical Revolution seeks to upend that hierarchy, bringing classical music into the bar, onto the street.

In doing so, Classical Revolution is redrawing a centuries-old map of the musical city. Rather than classical music emanating from one sole beacon, the concert hall, a decentralized, rhizomic network of "serious sound" emerges throughout the city. That such geography mirrors recent trends in urban planning and theory is no coincidence: San Francisco is a city highly conscious of living with the tragic results of monumental mid-century urban renewal and "Manhattanization" projects. This paper examines the roots and consequences of such a drastic re-conceptualization of classical space, using maps of Classical Revolution venues and interviews with its participants to try and elucidate the new urban reality of 21st century music-making—its benefits, its flaws and its ultimate sustainability.

John Pippen, University of Western Ontario

A Postmodern Avant-Garde: Eighth Blackbird, Cultural Authority, and New Music for the Masses

Through an analysis of ritual structure, musical text, and the politics of space, this paper demonstrates how the philosophy of an American musical subculture shapes musical experience. In 2011, the new music ensembles Eighth Blackbird and Third Coast Percussion as well as Chicago's Office of Tourism and Culture produced a concert of Steve Reich's music at Chicago's Pritzker Pavilion. Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork and participant interviews, I analyze this concert and the venue itself as embodying a need to secure both mass appeal and artistic prestige, two goals that often conflict. For Eighth Blackbird, the event was intended to function both as a conventional art music concert and as an advertisement for new music. Producers viewed Pritzker Pavilion's combination of formal seating and casual lawn space as a place for immersive listening that also allowed passers-by the chance to encounter new music. Participants who enjoyed the event described Reich's music as an artistic expression of Chicago's soundscape, and imagined Pritzker Pavilion and Millennium Park as an idealized urban environment ostensibly accessible to all. For others, the concert challenged important aspects of the art music ritual and undermined musical experience. From this analysis I theorize a sociocultural epistemology, a postmodern avant-garde. This concept describes a philosophy held by Eighth Blackbird and other groups who strive to increase the size of new music's audience in the United States while simultaneously preserving its cultural authority.

11 am Break

11:30 am Session II: Analyzing Music, Analyzing Practice

Rachel Chacko, Whitman College

Musical Hybrids and the Formation of a 20th Century Canon: Lou Harrison's Works for Gamelan and Western Instruments

As scholars consider classical music's present, central to this endeavor must be recognition of the growing interest in the performance and study of musical hybrids. Given the increasing

interconnectedness of the diverse cultures of the world, and the breakdown of barriers between “serious” and popular music and between Eastern and Western musical practices, an overarching aesthetic of inclusiveness has marked many works of the past forty years, but will also likely characterize music of the immediate future. Yet much, if not all, of this hybrid music remains outside the traditional canon. The work of scholars interested in cultural theory as applied to cross-cultural musical influence has been focused on developing frameworks for categorizing various approaches to creating transcultural music. This broader theorizing about different definitions or critical approaches to cultural borrowing is pertinent, but our understanding of the nuances of each category is best grounded in critical consideration of individual artworks and individual composers.

To this end, I offer, in this essay, a close reading of Lou Harrison’s music for Indonesian gamelan and Western instruments as a model for demonstrating what we stand to learn by carefully considering the finest details of specific compositions. With his lifelong fascination with Asian artistic traditions, his interest in stylistic juxtapositions, and his devotion to melodic beauty, Harrison has been regarded as a West Coast musical dilettante. Close examination of specific pieces, however, reveals compositional complexities that challenge such characterizations. Beyond an expression of East-West hybridity, his works show a sophisticated approach to melody that challenges the common notion of melodic writing as inherently unsophisticated and invites us to reconsider the centuries-old Western tradition of privileging harmony over melody. In so doing may we begin to contemplate the formation of an alternative canon that speaks to music’s expressive potential in the 21st century.

Andrea Moore, University of California, Los Angeles
Neoliberalism and the Entrepreneurial Musician

The 2012 MacArthur Fellowship recipients included a 34-year old musician named Claire Chase, flutist and the founder of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). While the MacArthur fellowships often include musicians from various traditions and genres, Chase was actually identified in official materials and subsequent reporting as an “arts entrepreneur and flutist.” This designation reflects a growing emphasis among musicians and music educators on entrepreneurship in classical music’s concert culture. Arts journalists and high profile arts bloggers consistently link entrepreneurial practices and concepts - especially “flexibility” and “innovation” - to an ideal of classical music’s “renewal” in the United States. ICE is only one of many recently formed contemporary music ensembles prized for their entrepreneurial conception and flexibility. At the conservatory level, where new courses in entrepreneurship spring up yearly, the models these groups present are increasingly perpetuated; they seem equally valorized by critics and practitioners alike.

In this paper, I consider musical entrepreneurship in the context of neoliberalism, defined by political theorist David Harvey as the proposal that “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.” Neoliberalism’s proponents have promoted entrepreneurship in almost all aspects of public and private American life, pushing to create markets in areas previously sheltered, however slightly, from market pressures. Concert culture is one such area. In neoliberal labor discourse, entrepreneurship is often presented as a welcome alternative to old-fashioned, hierarchical labor conditions, union shops in particular. Drawing on Harvey and political

theorist Wendy Brown, I examine the relationship between neoliberal ideals and the push for musical entrepreneurship, considering especially the tension between neoliberalism's realities for musical workers and the extent to which entrepreneurship is increasingly upheld as the most viable - and desirable - point of entry into a 21st century concert music career.

12:30 – 1:30 pm Lunch Break

1:30 pm Session III: High and Low

David Blake, State University of New York – Stony Brook

Homo Academicus, Homo Omnivorus: Recasting the Relationship between Higher Education and Musical Taste

The writings of Pierre Bourdieu, especially *Distinction* and *Homo Academicus*, have demonstrated how higher education produces and legitimizes cultural dispositions. In particular, Bourdieu's theorization of academic taste is predicated on the acquisition of "cultural capital" through the development of a taste oriented exclusively toward highbrow cultural forms such as avant-garde or learned art music. His analyses remain insightful for connecting the seemingly personal expression of musical taste with the social power and institutional structure of higher education. However, Bourdieu's studies, which are derived from sociological investigations of 1970s French academe, are distant enough to merit a reevaluation of their applicability for the production of musical taste in the contemporary Western university.

This presentation argues that contemporary academic taste should be understood not through Bourdieu's highbrow model, but through an inclusive, "omnivorous" disposition. I draw on omnivore theory, a sociological theory introduced by Richard Peterson which argues that taste does not correlate with class through "brow" level of music, but instead through the quantity of musical genres a listener appreciates. Omnivore theory accounts for a fundamental shift in taste production within higher education: from Bourdieu's brow distinctions which exclude music of other races to an inclusive, accumulative paradigm appreciating music from other races while simultaneously excluding music associated with lower intraracial *class* positions. To demonstrate this, I illuminate how omnivorous taste is manifested within two spheres: recent music scholarship which combines art and popular music (Dmitri Tymoczko's *A Geometry of Music*; Michael Long's *Beautiful Monsters*); and indie musicians from Ivy League backgrounds who merge Afro-pop, punk, and classical influences (Vampire Weekend, the Dirty Projectors). Though these examples decenter Bourdieu's homologies between "highbrow" music and contemporary taste within the university, I elucidate how the dispositions evidenced remain beholden to class-based cultural hierarchies, perpetuating rather than challenging epistemologies of academic culture.

Daniela Smolov Levy, Stanford University

Opera: Dead or Alive in HD?

Rumors of opera's death have long been greatly exaggerated. The Metropolitan Opera's "Live in HD" initiative, begun in 2006, is the latest large-scale effort to "save" opera in America from fading into oblivion. Broadcasting select performances live to movie theaters across the country, the Met's HD initiative bears many of the hallmarks of previous efforts to popularize

opera in America since 1900. In promoting opera as socially inclusive yet culturally exclusive, the HD project is one of many such recurring popularization attempts that have included producing opera in English, offering it at “popular prices,” and disseminating it through radio and television. I argue that the HD broadcasts are the culmination of a particular type of populist endeavor, one of uplift (even if not labeled as such), that caters to new audiences by emphasizing opera’s prestige at the same time as facilitating access and adopting techniques from other types of contemporary entertainment. But the HD project also differs from earlier efforts in one important respect: the broadcasts promote an “authentic” experience of opera, the contemplation of an exalted museum piece, even while casting opera as both entertaining and educational. The embrace of musical authenticity as a central value – the inviolability of the score and, to a lesser extent, of the libretto – has been prompted, I suggest, by the advent of supertitles and the emergence of opera studies as a major field in musicology. An examination of key elements of the HD broadcasts, including repertoire, staging, camerawork, venue, and intermission features, along with an analysis of recent surveys of HD and live opera attendance in America, reveals both continuity and change in the ways in which the HD initiative seeks to mitigate the longstanding tension between opera’s elite traditionalism and the need to appeal to mass audiences to ensure its survival.

Elizabeth Keenan, Fordham University

Indie Values, Symphonic Spaces: High Art, Low Art, and the “New” Audience

From the promotion of NBC Symphony Orchestra to the Boston Pops to the London Symphony’s CD of classic rock, symphony orchestras have constantly attempted to reach beyond an educated elite to a popular public. Orchestras’ recent turn toward critically acclaimed, youthful indie rock acts offers a means to rethink the ways that cultural capital operates in both popular and classical music. Over the past few years, the Los Angeles Philharmonic has collaborated with indie rock acts Grizzly Bear and the Dirty Projectors, Brooklyn-based bands whose critical approval outstrips their record sales. Unlike the LA Philharmonic’s Hollywood Bowl concerts, which pair popular acts with obscure ones, these collaborations have taken place in the symphony hall and are carefully tailored to the bands’ repertoire. Both Grizzly Bear and the Dirty Projectors have received critical accolades for their music, which draws on the pastoral, layers musical styles, incorporates unusual instrumentation, and—in the case of the Dirty Projectors—appropriates world music; in short, these groups have absorbed various elements that helped to define elite taste cultures in the postwar era. But what audience does the Philharmonic hope to attract with these groups, considering their limited commercial appeal? How do these bands reframe tastes of elite culture across generational divides? How do they mirror its problems, especially through the limited class and race bases of their audiences and the bands’ constructions of white, middle-class masculinity? This paper draws on ethnography and musical analysis to answer questions about the connections between indie rock and symphonic taste cultures.

3:00 Break

3:30 pm Keynote address – Robert Fink, University of California, Los Angeles