

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF MUSIC TEACHING AND PERFORMANCE

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Modernizing Practice Paradigms for New Music

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I. Introduction

New music is no longer marginalized. Musicians have never been more independent, more diverse and more empowered. The purpose of this book is to further possibilities of growth, modernizing practice paradigms by updating theories of learning and performance preparation. While creating new learning models, I use information from fields that have studied stamina, peak performance and practice efficiency – scientifically. Modern repertoire includes new and extended playing techniques, but musicians are still studying in the same ways we always have.

To date, pedagogical materials have given us dictionaries of extended techniques and composers have developed a grammar in using them. In just the past few years, new technology has created tremendous ease of access to these materials. For example, as an offshoot of Robert Dick's groundbreaking work in developing new fingerings, Andrew Botros developed an algorithm which notates all of the possible fingerings for multiphonics, microtones and altered timbres. Now a flutist or composer can bring a phone or tablet into a practice room and access every mathematical fingering possibility. YouTube has changed accessibility to new music. Everyone can now hear repertoire that was previously only heard in new music festivals. Extended techniques used to be a mystery, requiring a brute strength and score reading prowess to figure them out. Now we have expert models of them online. Robert Dick, Helen Bledsoe and Matthias Ziegler, among others, have made excellent online tutorials. One YouTube channel syncs recordings of Brian Ferneyhough's works with the score. In addition to this, new music has had some very public successes. In 2012, Claire Chase was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship for her work with I.C.E. (International Contemporary Ensemble). Greg Patillo, the beat boxing flutist, composed a piece for the National High School Soloist's Competition for the National Flute Association. Selected conservatories have added programs in contemporary performance practice and new faculty are increasingly reflecting our stylistic diversity.

In spite of these successes, there is still a divide among musicians. Resistance to learning music composed since World War II remains. Opinions expressing resistance or dislike are easy to find. James Pappoutsakis, former principal flutist of the Boston Symphony, has remarked, "Contemporary music

should not distort the tone quality or degrade the player.”³ This reflects the idea that classical musicians strive for a homogenous tone, and that when we step outside of this, we’re wrong. The composer Virgil Thompson said, “The European effort toward writing atonal music not for noise-making instruments but for those whose design has been perfected over centuries for avoiding tonal obfuscation has been [...] a waste of effort, save possible for proving it could be done.”⁴

Besides these opinions among mainstream musicians, academia has its own biases. Robert P. Morgan, in his textbook *Twentieth Century Music; A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, dedicates only two paragraphs to the importance of IRCAM, Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique, and makes only a brief mention of the Darmstadt Ferienkurse.⁵ The name is written only in passing, omitting any discussion of its philosophy or current influence on composition.

The editors of *Source* magazine had the following comment:

Since, by definition, the avant-garde is at the ‘growing edge’ of music, new scores must be published and circulated while their concepts are fresh, not years after the composition. [...] In this way, everyone gains true perspective, and music advances. [...] While it is a fact that not everyone - least of all professional musicians and educators - *wants* to make an effort to gain ‘true perspective,’ it is equally true that new music will advance and eventually take over the most conservative citadels of learning - for the simple reason that it always has, always does, and always will do so.⁶

There is still a stylistic divide. In 2007, I conducted a randomized study and saw this more clearly. The study was carried out through the “Flute List Pages,” a listserv with over 2000 members. 187 flutists agreed to participate in a blind study with the requirement that they were teaching or majoring in music in an American university music program. There were no qualifiers for majors, meaning this was a randomized selection including graduates

3 Toff (1985) p. 280.

4 Thompson (1981) p. 11.

5 Both IRCAM and Darmstadt were profoundly influenced by Pierre Boulez as he wanted to move music in new directions after World War II. Darmstadt was founded in 1946 by Wolfgang Steineke, and various composers who took part there were Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Luciano Berio and many others. IRCAM, was founded in 1969 by Pierre Boulez and was funded by the French Government and Georges Pompidou. Boulez served as director of IRCAM from 1970 until 1992.

6 Chase (1967) p. 80.

and undergraduates in both music performance and music education. The following data proved noteworthy:

Table 1: Survey Responses

Extended Technique Experience	85
No Experience	102
Age Range	18-39

(n=187)

From these flutists, 85 had studied at least one work with extended techniques. From those 85, the response was overwhelmingly positive towards new music in general. Many were rock/jazz based with two classical students having credited *Jethro Tull* with their exposure to new techniques. What was missing from 100% of the flutists was any advanced work or work of the *new complexity*.⁷ Also, appearing only once was Luciano Berio's *Sequenza I* (1958), and no one had played any work of Pierre Boulez.

Because of the speed at which technology is changing our access, and because of the recent and very public successes of Claire Chase and Greg Patillo, I am going to suggest two things. One, by the time I correlated the answers from the respondents in this study and secured this publishing contract, these answers might no longer reflect the current situation. Two, with ease of accessibility to extended techniques tutorials, and with young, energetic role models like Chase and Patillo, there is no longer any excuse not to learn them. The stigma of being misunderstood by making "noises" is no longer valid.

During the study mentioned above, some respondents who do not teach modern repertoire said that it was not needed for their students' careers. Others said that their students were not ready. One said that she does not see that her students will need new music, as they are majoring in music education. Harry Partch in his *Genesis of a Music* (1947) writes about this very idea, that of education:

⁷ New complexity is a compositional movement dating from approximately 1970. Compositions are known for using dense notation incorporating poly-rhythms, extended techniques and microtonality thus making the scores highly demanding and sometimes unplayable for the performer.

It is not difficult for the alert student to acquire the traditional techniques. Under the pressures of study these are unconsciously and all too easily absorbed. The extent to which an individual can resist being blindly led by tradition is a good measure of his vitality.⁸

Partch calls it *unconscious*. Will extended techniques become unconscious as well? Music students spend hours practicing in small practice rooms adjacent to one another. A common aesthetic penetrates the walls. Partch talks about the desire musicians have to improve, and that this definition of improvement is too narrow. He criticizes musicians for wanting to improve only performance skills. He continues that “good pianists, good teachers, good composers, and ‘good’ music no more creates a spirit of investigation and a vital age in music than good grades in school create a spirit of investigation and a body of thinking citizens.”⁹ In the current changing arts economy, musicians would be wise to create a new vital age in music.

We’re in a different place historically with new music. It used to be that the performers who took on a new work had to decipher it on their own, learning new notations, new techniques and internalizing the sound language of a composer. This process shows tremendous respect for a musical work. It speaks to the dedication and time-consuming process of realizing a composer’s imagination. Nonetheless, performers who had gone through that process came through changed. This changed their listening, their musicality and their concept of their role as an interpreter of new music. This intense relationship, the relationship between performer and work, creates a palpable energy in a performance. I believe, personally, that this energy was what I was drawn to when I was first exposed to new music. Now we are in a time where we can simply imitate the forerunners. The new sound world is accessible for all of us. This might mean that new music gets new ideas. It might also mean that this working process dissipates.

Aims

In order for new music to keep its fire and its intense work ethic, I am suggesting that we need to modernize ideas of practice and peak performance. There is a process of self-discovery that happens when one enters into a new sound language and takes the responsibility for its realization. This book identifies elements in that process and gives them a structure.

⁸ Partch (1947).

⁹ Ibid.

Research in sports science has shown success with maximizing performance capabilities while minimizing the risks of overuse injuries. These successes will be analyzed and then adapted for a musical context. New music requires both an intellectual or logical involvement and an increased body awareness or physicality. Much new music requires more stamina than traditional repertoire.

This is taught through two main concepts: the broader concept of practice variability and the more focused training of periodization. The two go hand in hand. Practice variability ensures maximal learning with minimal repetition and periodization creates peak performances. By varying tasks, both the logical and physical work can be attended to. Periodization teaches the performer about energy expenditure and builds endurance with embouchure, breathing and concentration.

The application of periodization is taught first by creating a continuum of extended techniques, focusing on each technique in isolation and then by applying periodization in a sample program leading to a performance of *(t)air(e)* (1980-83) for solo flute by Heinz Holliger.

Changing practice paradigms extends to any instrument and every repertoire. This is vital in all fields of music, in all levels of music education and for live concerts to succeed. This ensures that we don't become merely imitators of sound, but thoughtful interpreters. Modernizing ideas of practice and preparation addresses our willingness to step out of the confines of our techniques, even when those techniques are already "extended."