ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	WORDS ON MUSIC, PERHAPS: THE WRITINGS OF ARTHUR BERGER
	Jennifer Miriam Kobuskie, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020
Dissertation directed by:	Olga Haldey, Associate Professor, Musicology and Ethnomusicology Division, School of Music

When Arthur Berger (1912–2003) is mentioned in the history books, it is often as a mid-20th century American composer, or a practitioner and teacher of music theory who, during his tenure at Brandeis University, had trained a generation of theorists and composers. This dissertation aims to demonstrate that Berger made one of his most significant contributions to the history of 20th-century music as a writer of prose. As a full-time critic, his work was featured in major newspapers of New York and Boston, and nationally distributed periodicals. He helped found two music journals, contributed regularly to others, and authored two books. For decades, his voice was widely heard and broadly influential. His aesthetic views, stated boldly and unapologetically, helped shape the post-WWII discourse on modern, particularly American music, and continue to impact both public and scholarly debate on this topic.

This study surveys Berger's personal history as a writer, including his career as a music critic, his involvement with the creation of the scholarly journal

Perspectives of New Music, his pioneering biography of Aaron Copland, and his seminal article on Stravinsky's octatonicism. The dissertation also offers a detailed, comprehensive analysis of Berger's voluminous corpus of writings, both published and unpublished, as well as his personal archive of notes, drafts, and correspondence, in order to elucidate his aesthetic principles, and his views on a broad variety of subjects related to modern music, such as neoclassicism, nationalism, innovation and tradition, the music of Stravinsky, Copland, and their American successors, as well as the role of classical music in American culture, and the place of American music in the world. Finally, the study is concerned with the reception of Berger's ideas, his personal aesthetic evolution, and his lively involvement in his own reception.

WORDS ON MUSIC, PERHAPS: THE WRITINGS OF ARTHUR BERGER

by

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Dedication

In memory of Shelley G. Davis (1935-2015)

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List of Abbreviations

NYPL: New York Public Library

OHAM: Oral History of American Music

Editorial Procedures

The following editorial conventions are used throughout this dissertation.

1. Names appear according to the most current criteria of correctness regarding diacritics and transliterations, even in quotations and titles, where original spellings are overridden for the sake of consistency and electronic searchability.

2. For ease of readability, minor typographical errors within quoted materials—including spelling and punctuation—that do not alter the meaning of text have been corrected.

Introduction

Arthur Berger stated that his career had involved "donning […] many different hats: critic, journalist, educator, theorist, and even at one time, musicologist."[1] All these involved writing, and indeed, for several decades, Berger's words on music and the ideas they contained were subtly, perhaps clandestinely, considerably more significant in American musical discourse than conventionally realized.[2] Berger's influence was prominent. As a composer, his major works were programmed by prestigious orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony Orchestra, while his chamber pieces appeared in more intimate concert settings, programed by esteemed performers such as pianist Charles Rosen and renowned ensembles including the Boston Modern Orchestra Project and Dinosaur Annex. As academic faculty at Brandeis University, and later the New England Conservatory, Berger trained a generation of American composers and theorists. He associated, both professionally and socially, with some of the most eminent composers and performers of the twentieth century. As a public intellectual, he hosted national radio shows, wrote books, and delivered lectures to audiences of both novices and experts. His criticism was featured in major newspapers of New York and Boston, as well as in a variety of nationally distributed periodicals. He helped establish and was a founding editor of two music journals, and a regular

[1] Arthur Berger, *Reflections of an American Composer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 196.

[2] The title of this dissertation is adapted from Berger's first vocal work "Words for Music, Perhaps" (1939).

contributor to others. Beginning in the early 1930s, and continuing until the early part of the twenty-first century, Berger's fingerprints can be traced through numerous aspects of American classical-music culture. Yet in the historiography of American music, he remains less central to the discussion than this significance warrants.

Berger's compositional career will not be discussed here in a systematic or comprehensive way, nor will specific pieces be analyzed unless such analysis is relevant to the views expressed in his writings. Indeed, Berger's writings, both published and unpublished, are the focus of the present study. His criticism, theoretical writings, interviews, book-length studies, lectures, and correspondence will be analyzed to reveal his consistent aesthetics and his views on significant musical matters. Berger's ideas place him firmly in the orbit of post-war modernism, but moreover, they played a role in defining it. Berger staked out the reception of neoclassicism as a modernist movement and of Copland and Stravinsky as modernist composers, he steadfastly praised innovation while insisting on solidity of craftsmanship; and he contributed pivotally to the formation of academic theory as we know it today. In these and other ways, he strongly influenced both public and scholarly discussion of America's modern music, both theoretical and historical, for generations to come.

Secondary Sources

There are no book-length studies of Berger's life or his music. The most detailed discussion of his work is contained in Howard Pollack's 1992 book *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliot Carter to Frederic Rzewski*, where Berger warrants a chapter. It includes some background information and

contains a discussion of Berger's compositions.[3] Pollack returns to Berger in his biography of Aaron Copland, which features a discussion of his relationship with and writings on that composer.[4]

A chapter on Berger in cultural historian R. James Tobin's book, *Neoclassical Music in America: Voices of Clarity and Restraint*, is predominantly biographical in nature, with most information taken from an interview conducted by Ev Grimes in 1988 for Yale's Oral History of American Music collection.[5] Several compositions are also discussed, but in a cursory manner and without the technical vocabulary that would have been employed by a music scholar.

Further discussion of Berger's music is to be found in journal articles. The earliest of these is "The Composer as Mannerist" by John Mac Ivor Perkins, which contains an overview of Berger's compositional trajectory up until 1962, its date of publication.[6] A 1978 issue of *Perspectives of New Music* dedicated to Berger contains multiple studies, including Elaine Barkin's "Post Impressions: Arthur Berger's Trio for Guitar, Violin, and Piano"; Shelia Silver's "Pitch and Registral Distribution in Arthur Berger's Music for Piano"; Jane Coppock's "Intonazion (From Arthur

[3] Howard Pollack, *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and His Students, from Elliot Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Metuchen, New Jersey, Scarecrow Press, 1992), 78–103.

[4] Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 78–103.

[5] R. James Tobin, *Neoclassical Music in America: Voices of Clarity and Restraint* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

[6] John Mac Ivor Perkins, "The Composer as Mannerist," *Perspectives of New Music* 5, no. 1 (1966): 75–92.

Berger's *Partita for Piano*); and "A List of Works by Arthur Berger," compiled by Robert Frederick Jones.[7]

Bayan Northcott's 1982 *Musical Times* article "Arthur Berger: An Introduction at 70" contextualizes Berger's compositional output by relating his creative works to the events of his life.[8] Among the more recent studies is Rodney Lister's "Arthur Berger: The Progress of a Method," published in a 1995 issue of *American Music*. This lengthy analytical essay discusses aspects of Berger's compositions from each of his stylistic periods.[9] The appendix contains Berger's complete works list, including the details on premiere performances and publications; while out of date, it remains one of the most comprehensive and accurate databases on this subject.

Additional, more superficial secondary sources on Berger's life and works include reviews of his books and compositions, tribute pieces, biographical sketches, as well as program and liner notes.

Writings Pertaining to the Octatonic Scale

The largest body of scholarship related to Arthur Berger does not concern either his biography, compositions, or criticism. Rather, it is a scholarly response to one of his theoretical writings, specifically his seminal 1963 essay "Problems of Pitch

[7] All of these articles are located in the commemorative issue of *Perspectives of New Music* 17, no. 1 (1978). The aforementioned interview with Jane Coppock is also located in this issue.

[8] Bayan Northcott, "Arthur Berger: An Introduction at 70," *Musical Times* 123, no. 1671 (1982): 323–326.

[9] Rodney Lister, "Arthur Berger: The Progress of a Method," *American Music* 13, no. 1 (1995): 56–95.

Organization in Stravinsky." [10] Theorist Pieter van den Toorn's 1975 article, "Some Characteristics of Stravinsky's Diatonic Music," published in *Perspectives of New Music*, was the first to elaborate on Berger's contribution, with the same author's much later "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: The Sounds of Stravinsky" appearing in *Music Theory Spectrum* in 2003.[11] As an active participant in the debate surrounding the theory of the octatonic scale, van den Toorn's contributions to it may also be found in journals as responses to the writings of others.[12]

Theorist Joseph Straus's "Stravinsky's 'Tonal Axis'" was published in the *Journal of Music Theory* in 1982.[13] This article would prove a point of contention between Berger and its author, and result in correspondence and debate that included many of the writers mentioned in this dissertation. Other articles by theorists that contribute to the conversation include two by Allen Forte, "Debussy and the Octatonic" and "An Octatonic Essay by Webern: No. 1 of the *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet*, Op. 9," and Dmitri Tymoczko's article "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration"[14]

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[10] Arthur Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," *Perspectives of New Music* 2, no. 1 (1963):11–42.

[11] Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Some Characteristics of Stravinsky's Diatonic Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 14, no. 1 (1975): 104–138; Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: The Sounds of Stravinsky," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (2003): 167–202.

[12] See Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Communications: Letter from Pieter C. van den Toorn," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 2 (2000): 445–48 and its rebuttal, Steven Baur, "Reply to Pieter C. van den Toorn," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 2 (2000): 448–50. Also see Pieter C. Van den Toorn, "Letter to the Editor," *Journal of Music Theory* 28 no. 2 (1984): 321–325.

[13] Joseph Straus, "Stravinsky's 'Tonal Axis,'" *Journal of Music Theory* 26, no. 2 (1982): 261–290.

[14] Allen Forte, "Debussy and the Octatonic," *Music Analysis* 10, no. 1–2 (1991): 125–169; Allen Forte, "An Octatonic Essay by Webern: No. 1 of the *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet,* Op. 9," *Music*

In 1987, musicologist Richard Taruskin's article "Chez Pétrouchka: Harmony and Tonality 'chez' Stravinsky," addresses the topic of the octatonic scale; much of its content would later be incorporated into his 1996 study, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*.[15] The latter reignited Berger's interest in the octatonic scale, and he resumed writing and lecturing on it. Taruskin returns to the topic in 2011 with "Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov," an article that became the catalyst for another round of scholarly debate.[16]

Primary Sources

Unpublished primary sources consulted in the preparation of this dissertation are housed in several major libraries and archives. The "Arthur Berger Papers," preserved at the Music Division of the New York Public Library is the largest repository of such sources.[17] A smaller compilation of documents, also labeled "the Arthur Berger Papers," is held at the Robert D. Farber University and Special Collections Department of the Brandeis University Library.[18] Both collections include Berger's correspondence, drafts of lectures and notes on various subjects, published and

Theory Spectrum 16, no. 2 (1994): 171–19; Dmitri Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration," *Music Theory Spectrum* 24, no.1 (2002): 68–102.

[15] Richard Taruskin, "Chez Pétrouchka: Harmony and Tonality 'chez' Stravinsky," *19th Century Music* 10, no.3 (1987): 265–86, and Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996).

[16] Richard Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 169–185. This article, along with the others mentioned here, is discussed in more detail in chapter 8.

[17] Arthur Berger Papers, JPB04–38, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[18] Arthur Berger Papers, Robert D. Farber University Archives, Brandeis University.

unpublished writings, and musical manuscripts. Other relevant source materials are found in the Aaron Copland archive and the Irving Fine archive, both housed at the Library of Congress.[19]

Many of Berger's published writings are preserved in these archival collections as clippings. A notable difficulty in working with such materials is that not all clippings are fully identifiable. In some cases, identifying information, albeit missing from the clipping itself, is available as a penciled marginal notation in Berger's or an archivist's hand, and has been corroborated whenever possible. In other cases, the information is partial or entirely absent. In citing such materials, all available information is included, as well as the details of the archive and collection, in which the clipping was found. Additional Berger publications were uncovered by consulting historical newspaper databases, as well as the archives of individual publications such as *Partisan Review* and *Saturday Review*. These are cited accordingly.

Particularly important sources of information for this study are lengthy and unusually candid interviews Berger gave in the second half of his life. The most significant of these was an interview he gave to Ev Grimes on 20–21 September 1988 in Cambridge Massachusetts as part of the "Oral History of American Music Collection: Major Figures of American Music" (OHAM).[20] The interview was tape-

[19] Aaron Copland Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress; Leonard Bernstein Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress; Irving Fine Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

[20] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The OHAM dates from 1969 when Vivian Perlis, then librarian at the Yale School of Music, began recording interviews with associates of Charles Ives. Currently the collection contains over 2,900 interviews. It is located in the Gilmore Music Library at Yale University. See "Oral History of American Music" Yale University Library: Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, <https://web.library.yale.edu/music/oham>, accessed 1 March 2020.

recorded and subsequently transcribed, but the quality of the transcript of the interview was not to Berger's liking. When asked to review the transcript, with the caveat that only small changes were acceptable, as a "large-scale revision is neither necessary nor desirable," he replied:

> I should inform you that notwithstanding the advice in your letter, my revisions are unavoidably "large-scale." I have had several such interviews, but I've never had a transcript that is so garbled and incomprehensible. […] In revising the discussion, I have sometimes been obliged to retype whole pages. Other pages have substantial revisions pasted over them. […] Except in subject matter, the transcript deviates drastically from the tape, *which I should like to have destroyed.*[21]

It is unknown whether the original interview tape was indeed destroyed, as per Berger's instructions; however, it was not located for this study. Therefore, information herein was taken from the drafts of the transcript with notes and edits in Berger's hand, located in the NYPL archive.

Other interviews of note include one conducted in 1978 by Jane Coppock and published in *Perspectives of New Music* under the title: "A Conversation with Arthur Berger"; Peter's Child's 1987 interview "A Backward Glance: Music Activity in New England, c. 1930–1950," printed in *Essays on Modern Music*; Ross Bauer's interview published in *Musically Incorrect,* a book of interviews of composers by composers, all of whom were published with the C.F. Peters Corporation; and a 1987 interview with Bruce Duffie, first broadcast on the WNIB Classical 97 Chicago, with the transcript subsequently included on Duffie's self-published online repository.[22]

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[21] Letter from Janice Fournier to Arthur Berger, 5 July 1989; Arthur Berger to Janice Fournier, 6 February 1990, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[22] Jane Coppock and Arthur Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," *Perspectives of New Music* 17, no.1 (1978): 40–67; Peter Child, "A Backward Glance: Music Activity in New England, c. 1930–1950, An Interview with Arthur Berger," *Essays on Modern Music* 3 (1987): 11–22; Hayes Biggs and

Composer Andrew Rindfleish also generously shared with me a transcript of an unpublished interview he conducted with Berger on 1 October 1991.[23]

The consistency among these interviews is striking: it appears that despite his age, Berger's memory remained sharp, and his accuracy of recall truly extraordinary. Furthermore, on occasions when he had changed his mind about an idea or an event previously discussed, he readily admitted it. This allowed for assigning a degree of reliability to the interview contents that such sources do not necessarily command. That said, every effort was made to corroborate the factual information Berger presented (dates, places, etc.) through other sources, whenever possible.

Reflections of an American Composer

Another unique source of information on Berger's views of both his own career and the American musical landscape, in which he was both witness and participant, is *Reflections of an American Composer*, a book he published with the University of California Press in 2002, at age 90. Winner of the 2003 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award, the book received numerous accolades and has been acknowledged as a valuable resource.[24] Composer Rodney Lister wrote that the book included "serious

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Susan Orel, eds., *Musically Incorrect: Conversations About Music at the End of the 20th Century* (New York: C.F. Peters Corporation, 1998), 46–69; Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, WNIB-FM, 28 March 1987, transcript <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>, accessed 7 October 2019. Bruce Duffie was an announcer and producer at Chicago's classical radio station, WNIB Classical 97 Chicago. Throughout his radio career and thereafter, he interviewed hundreds of composers, as well as other musicians. He maintains a website that hosts transcripts of these interviews. <http://www.bruceduffie.com/intst.html>

[23] Andrew Rindfleish, "Conversations with Arthur Berger," 1 October 1991, unpublished typescript, courtesy of the author.

[24] [American Society of Composers and Publishers], "36th Annual ASCAP Awards," ASCAP: We Create Music, accessed 7 October 2019 <ascap.com/press/2003/deems_121003.aspx>.

reflections in aesthetics and the intellectual life of his times, details of the journalist's life in New York in the 1940s and Boston and New York now, the history of music as an academic discipline in American universities, and keen analytic insights into all kinds of music."[25] Musicologist Arnold Whittall stated that Berger's "bracing thoughts about music […] never leave [the reader] indifferent or unilluminated," and that the book's contents are enlightening to both the "most puritanical, old-style theorist or the most modishly self-conscious, context seeking musicologist."[26]

In the eighteen years since its publication, *Reflections* has been cited in a wide range of musicological writings by authors such as Leon Botstein, Martin Brody, Barry Seldes, Allan Shawn, Richard Taruskin, and Nicholas Tawa.[27] Notably, these writings focus not on Berger himself, but on other musical topics about which Berger had commented. This demonstrates the lack of Berger-related scholarship in the past two decades—but it also highlights these scholars' interest in what he had to say.

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[25] Rodney Lister, "Review," *Tempo* 57, no. 224 (April 2003): 60.

[26] Arnold Whittall, "Review: Code Breaking," *Musical Times* 144, no. 1884 (Autumn 2003), 71.

[27] Leon Botstein, "Copland Reconfigured," in *Aaron Copland and His World*, Edited by Carol Oja and Judith Tick (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 439–76; Leon Botsetin, "Listening to Shostakovich," in *Shostakovich and His World*, edited by Laurel E. Fay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 355–382; Martin Brody, "Founding Sons: Copland, Sessions, and Berger on Genealogy and Hybridity," in *Aaron Copland and His World*, Edited by Carol Oja and Judith Tick (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15–43; Barry Seldes, *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Allan Shawn, *Leonard Bernstein: An American Musician* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014), 36; Richard Taruskin, "Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2011); Richard Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Nicholas Tawa, *The Great American Symphony: Music, Depression, and War* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

The genre of *Reflections* is difficult to define: it is neither a memoir nor an autobiography, although it includes elements of both. As he states in the book's introduction,

> The decision to write conventional memoirs is something I have scarcely ever had to contend with. To make interesting reading out of one's personal life requires the craft and skill of a fiction writer, which I am not sure I possess. Also I am not convinced that my origins, childhood, and amorous pursuits would be of sufficient interest to most readers even if they were to be conveyed through the most elegant writing. I do however believe that as an actual participant much of the time since about 1930 (more specifically, 1929, the year of the notorious Wall Street Crash) and as a composer and critic who has been a zealous observer all of the time, I am in a good position to have a story to tell.[28]

Wearing the "hats" of both composer and critic, Berger thus takes up the mantle of an eyewitness to his life's story, rather than its hero, as the genre of an autobiography demands. He also acknowledges another peril of autobiographical writing, the unreliability of memory, with a quote from a fellow composer and memoirist Ned Rorem: "The past exists only inside the head…attempts to retrieve it are current impulses which distort, of necessity, since we know now more than we knew then; so the past is by definition embellished."[29] Seeing the issue as a challenge rather than a deterrent, Berger notably approached it as a music historian would, using "old reviews and articles to […] verify facts (including dates) and ideas," and relying heavily on past writings, both published and unpublished, updating and revising them to fit into the context of his new narrative. A significant portion of the book's content

[28] *Reflections*, 1.

[29] *Reflections*, 3. Original quote is located in Ned Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 20.

thus represents Berger's most recent thoughts on matters with which he had long been concerned:

> Chapter 14, "New Linguistic Modes and the New Theory," incorporates quite a bit of the thinking that determined the approach to an article of the same name that appeared in *Perspectives of New Music*, and chapter 8, "Postmodern Music," is a version of an article published in *The Boston Review* under the title "Is There a Postmodern Music?" The reader will also encounter references of a more modest nature to other of my publications. In chapter 15, "The Octatonic Scale," I have leaned rather heavily on a lecture I gave at Harvard University in a series sponsored by the music department. [30]

Berger's intended audience included both professional musicians and lay enthusiasts without formal training or musical literacy.

Reflections is divided into four sections: I. Trends in Twentieth-Century American Composition; II. Writing about Music; III. Aesthetics and Musical Analysis; IV. Retrospective. It concludes with an appendix, "From my Scrapbook," which features reprints of reviews. The book revisits many of the aesthetic ideas Berger had established and refined throughout his career, and reflects on major personalities and events in America's musical history. By writing it, Berger presumably sought to represent for posterity a summary of himself as a critic and musical thinker, and with this in mind, it is a veritable catalog of the points he most desired to emphasize. Because the material it presents aligns with what he had written and said before, with small yet sometimes notable adjustments and elaborations, *Reflections* often offers Berger's most elegant formulation of a given idea. For all these reasons, it was a useful resource for this study.

[30] *Reflections*, 3.

Structure of the Dissertation

The organization of this dissertation is as follows: front matter, introduction, eight chapters, conclusion, and bibliography. The introduction outlines the scope and limitations of the study and discusses its sources and methodology. Chapter 1 is a brief biography of Arthur Berger, to be used as a reference throughout the remainder of the document. Chapter 2, "Criticism," surveys Berger's role as a professional music critic, including his approach to the genre of newspaper criticism, his writing style, his influences, the scope and impact of his work, and his view of the field of criticism during and after his engagement in it. Chapter 3 focuses on one of Berger's most consequential criticism projects, the music theory journal *Perspectives of New Music*, of which he was the co-founder and first editor. Chapter 4, "Berger's writings on 'Americanism,'" discusses Berger's thoughts on the concept of American musical nationalism, the viability and implications of creating a national compositional style, and his critical views of the most influential trends and composers of American classical music. The related Chapter 5 continues to explore these ideas by focusing on Berger's views of one American composer who was often at the center of his argument, Aaron Copland, as well as the impact of these views on Copland scholarship and reception. Chapter 6 addresses Berger's aesthetics of innovation through the case studies of four of his contemporary composers, as he saw them both in person and through a critic's eye: Charles Ives, Darius Milhaud, Samuel Barber, and John Cage. Chapter 7 tackles Berger's complex understanding of neoclassicism, both as a broadly aesthetic term, and as a distinct stylistic trend in the music of Stravinsky. The chapter also addresses Berger's views on the idea of the so-called

"Stravinsky School," its composers, and his own compositional voice within the neoclassical context. Chapter 8, "Writings on Music Theory," presents Berger as a theorist and analyst of modern music, discusses the new ideas and terminology he introduced into the field of post-tonal analysis, and addresses the tumultuous reception of his influential and controversial article on octatonicism in the music of Stravinsky. Conclusions summarizes the dissertation's findings and offers suggestions for further research.

Chapter 1: Biography

Prominent American composer, critic, theorist, and teacher Arthur Victor Berger was born on 15 May 1912 in New York City to parents Louis Charles Berger, an American-born engineer, and Ethel Gertenzang, a Polish-Jewish immigrant. The household practiced Judaism when he was growing up, but he did not continue to do so as an adult. Berger spent the majority of his life in the New York and Boston metropolitan areas. He was married to Esther Turitz from 1937 until her death in 1960, and then remarried in 1967 to Ellen Phillipsborn Tessman. The couple remained together until Berger's death on 7 October 2003 in Boston, Massachusetts. He had no children.

Education

Berger's earliest musical memories are of his mother singing him traditional songs and of listening to his father's phonograph records, especially those of Enrico Caruso singing the Duke in *Rigoletto*. He experienced little classical instrumental music, as he was not taken to concerts as a child and had no music education classes in primary school.

When Berger was eleven, his aunt gave the family her old piano. He described his first experience with the piano thus: "I started imitating all the songs I had heard on the recording [of *Rigoletto*] by ear, without having had any training yet. I guess the music I would improvise then was sort of banging on the piano with my palms,

thinking I'm in Carnegie Hall."[31] Initially, it was Berger's sister who received piano lessons, but as he recalled, "I got very impatient with her not learning the lesson, and I would kind of learn it for her. And finally [my parents] gave me lessons."[32] He described these lessons as a "rigorous, boring kind of training," but credited to them his keen sight reading skills. Berger was most content, though, when improvising at the piano. By age eighteen, he no longer studied piano, and instead began giving piano lessons.

Between 1925 and 1928, Berger attended the selective, accelerated Townsend Harris High School, then spent two years enrolled at City College of New York. Berger transferred to New York University's School of Music Education in 1930, hoping that education credentials would help him gain employment, most likely as a high-school teacher, in the already Depression-affected job market.[33] He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1934.[34] Following graduation, Berger began the application process for a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant that would fund him to write about the history of the WPA's involvement in American dance music.[35] In October of 1934, he chose instead to accept an offer of a fellowship from the "professional department" of the Longy School of Music in Cambridge,

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[31] Draft of OMAH interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Arthur Berger, "Application for *Who's Who in America*," TMs, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[35] For more information on the WPA and some of its programs, see Chapter 4.

Massachusetts, where he would be the first, and at the time the only, graduate student.[36]

While at Longy, Berger also began taking classes at Harvard, where his professors included musicologists Hugo Leichtentritt and Archibald Davidson, and composer Walter Piston.[37] Overburdened by the work, he requested a decreased course load at the Longy School, but was denied. As a result, he discontinued his studies there and accepted a fellowship to study full-time at Harvard.

At Harvard, Berger studied musicology. He became fascinated with the music of the Ancient Greeks, which he attributed to his interest in philosophy. He became close friends with painter Robert Motherwell and poet Delmore Schwartz, who, like him, were inspired by the teachings of Professor of Aesthetics David Prall.[38] Prall's influence proved pivotal to the formation of Berger's philosophical and aesthetic

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[36] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. Berger stated that the founders of Longy School wanted to form a graduate school similar to that of Julliard. The Longy School of Music was founded in 1915 by musician Georges Longy. In 2012 it merged with Bard College. Today, multiple graduate degrees are offered, including degrees in composition, historical performance, jazz and contemporary music, and music education. For a more in-depth history see: "Longy's History," Longy School of Music of Bard College <https://longy.edu/about/history/> accessed 2 February 2020. Berger was provided with tuition remission and, for the first month only, given a fifty-five-dollar stipend. Beyond that, he was expected to support himself. During the 1934–35 academic year, he completed the four required courses in solfeggio; harmonic analysis, counterpoint and fugue; piano; and history of music. See Letter from Yves Chardon to Arthur Berger, 31 October 1934, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[37] He also mentions that at this time he took a course taught by "a man from Wellesley," and a "difficult course in sight reading," which was taught by a woman who would "hit me on the hand if I didn't tell her all the keys that a sonata form went through after she played it to me." See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[38] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. David Prall (1886–1940) was an American philosopher who received his Ph.D. from University of California, Berkeley and taught there from 1921–30. His tenure at Harvard dates from 1920–21 and then 1930–40. Prall's most significant publications include two monographs, *Aesthetic Judgment* (1929) *and Aesthetic Analysis* (1936). See John R. Shook, ed., *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.)

beliefs, as reflected in both his teaching and his published writings. He acknowledged this influence freely throughout his life, and would go on to write the preface to the 1967 edition of Prall's *Aesthetic Analysis*.

Berger's Harvard years garnered him a number of awards and scholarships. In April of 1936, he received a University fellowship that provided him with $1000 for the 1936–37 school year.[39] A $250 grant from the American Council of Learned Societies allowed him to spend two months at the Library of Congress studying music aesthetics and criticism.[40] After graduating with a Master's degree in musicology in 1936, Berger enrolled in Harvard's musicology Ph.D. program. While there, he received the John Knowles Paine Traveling Fellowship for the purpose of traveling to Paris to study at L'École Normale de Musique with Nadia Boulanger.[41]

Berger's work with Boulanger dates from 1937–39. Unlike many of his fellow American composers, his course of study did not include composition, although he reported he felt that his studies brought him "closer" to the field of composition.[42] Instead, he worked with her on his dissertation on the subject of Stravinsky's aesthetics.[43] It was during that trip that Berger first met Stravinsky himself at a tea

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[39] Letter from Lawrence Mayo, Assistant Dean of Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, to Arthur Berger, 1 April 1936, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[40] Letter from Donald Goodchild, Secretary, Committee on Musicology, American Council of Learned Societies, to Arthur Berger, 23 June 1936, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[41] Arthur Berger, "Guggenheim Application," typescript on printed form, and Letter from Lawrence Mayo to Arthur Berger, 1 April 1937, both Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[42] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[43] In his writings, Berger refers to his dissertation as his "thesis." Berger did not finish the document, yet the proposal and portions of the draft are located in the Arthur Berger Papers housed at the NYPL. The working title of the document was *An Aesthetic Basis for Stravinsky's Diatonicism*.

party hosted by Boulanger; he also "attended some of Stravinsky's rehearsals."[44] As he later recalled, "it was at that time in Paris that I felt the full impact of Stravinsky's neoclassicism."[45] Berger returned to the United States laden with the scores of Stravinsky's music, including *Perséphone*, *Concerto for Two Solo Pianos*, *Serenade*, *Jeu de Cartes*, and *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto*, and possessed of a newly-found enthusiasm for composition.[46] Upon his return and in need of a stable income, Berger accepted a teaching position at Mills College, where he would remain for two years. Following this, he returned to the East Coast and considered finishing his Ph.D., but faced with changes to Harvard's musicology faculty and new degree requirements, chose not to complete it.[47] He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the New England Conservatory in 1987.[48]

Berger never received formal composition lessons at New York University, Harvard, or during his studies with Nadia Boulanger, instead focusing on musicology and music theory. He did, however, dabble in composition throughout his schooling, for instance,

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[44] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Ross Bauer, in Hayes Biggs and Susan Orel, eds., *Musically Incorrect: Conversations About Music at the End of the 20th Century* (New York: C.F. Peters Corporation, 1998), 55. Berger does not specify which rehearsals he attended nor the pieces being prepared for performance.

[45] *Musically Incorrect*, 55.

[46] Peter Child, "A Backward Glance: Music Activity in New England, c. 1930–1950, An Interview with Arthur Berger," *Essays on Modern Music* 3 (1987): 16.

[47] When asked why he did not finish the degree, Berger replied: "I came back thinking I'd finish my Ph.D. and […] Donald Grout was there and I was scared stiff about taking my exams with this new regime. Leichtentritt had been so much the gentleman scholar. It was not as rigid. He wasn't interested in dates and influences and rigid things. […] And so I didn't go for my degree." See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[48] Diploma from the New England Conservatory conferring the Degree of "Honorary Doctorate of Music" upon Arthur Berger, 17 May 1987. Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

composing under the direction of Vincent Jones while at New York University, although Berger would later contend that the latter was unable to comprehend the complexities of his style. Berger was also able to exchange ideas informally with other composers. His friendship with Bernard Hermann and Jerome Moross—he referred to their triumvirate as "three holy terrors"—proved fruitful, as they introduced him to the "big composers in New York," among them Ruth Crawford, Henry Cowell, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, and Edgard Varèse.[49] Also, it was through their invitation to a meeting of the Young Composers Group that Berger became associated with Aaron Copland. The group was formed by Elie Siegemeister in 1932. Membership consisted of composers all under the age of twenty-five. In addition to Moross and Hermann, regular attendees at these meetings included Vivian Fine and Israel Citkowitz. The group met informally at Copland's apartment, where they discussed compositional ideas, and debated political topics. Copland would arrange for the group to attend concerts and meet with established and prominent composers. Berger stressed that the tenor of the group was not one of friends sharing their music in the spirit of artistic betterment. He described the informal meetings as being "pretty hectic because of the arguments both about music and about politics." Although the group discussed compositional ideas in a general sense, and some shared their music with the group, Berger did not.[50]

While at Mills College, Berger did share his compositions with Milhaud, a fellow faculty member. Berger would later come to see these meetings as his first

[49] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The "three holy terrors" comment can be found in Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered: An Oral History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002; reprint of New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 167.

[50] Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 186 and Arthur V. Berger, "The Young Composers' Group," *Trend: A Quarterly of the Seven Arts* (April–May–June 1933): 28.

composition lessons, although, as he explained, "it was not a formal teacher-student arrangement, but rather a gesture of showing one's achievements to an illustrious senior colleague."[51] He was also able to benefit from a free exchange of critiques with his close colleagues at Brandeis, Irving Fine and Harold Shapero, as well as with those in attendance at the Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood), where he was a frequent participant and in 1964, composer-in-residence.

Composition

Although Berger's activities as a composer are not the focus of this study, he saw himself primarily as such. Consequently, his scores form a counterpoint to his writings, often reflecting similar concerns; it is only in this context that they will be discussed in the present study. Below is a brief overview of his compositional career.

With the exception of a hiatus from 1933–39, Berger was active as a composer throughout his lifetime, and left a small but varied body of works, with his last piece completed in 2002, the year before his death. His compositional style can be divided into several broad periods. His early works have serial characteristics, which were inspired by his attendance of a 1930 performance of Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand*. When he began composing in this style, he had not yet had the opportunity to analyze Schoenberg's music, but had merely heard it.[52] Consequently, like several other first-generation American twelve-tone composers, Berger developed his own set of techniques, inspired by the same general idea. He

[51] See Child, "A Backward Glance," 14.

[52] Ibid., 12.

remembered: "It was from that time on that I thought well, I didn't know anything about twelve-tone music, or atonal music, but I decided I wanted to write twelve tone music, and so I started counting the notes and I used octaves and did things you're not supposed to do."[53] *Two Episodes* for piano was Berger's only early work to eventually reach publication, although he did not allow it into print until 1963, when it appeared in an anthology of piano works by various composers.[54]

Berger temporarily ceased composing in 1933, a decision he attributed to both stylistic and political reasons. He felt unsupported by his colleagues, especially the members of the Young Composers Group, who he feared would ostracize his music.[55] Furthermore, organizations such as the WPA pressured composers to adopt a "more accessible, populist idiom that would help advance the people's cause."[56] Berger felt that "one had to bring the message of the new order to the people in a language it could comprehend," which he saw as antithetical to his own stylistic preferences.[57] He summed up his situation thus: "It confused me terribly, because you had to decide which door to open and enter in order to be a composer. Simply wanting to satisfy a

[53] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[54] Arthur Berger, "Program Notes" for *The Music of Arthur Berger*, CRI 2007. The piece was published in *New Music for Piano*, edited by Joseph Prostakoff, New York: Lawson-Gould Music Publishers, 1963. There was also a third *Episode* composed, which was recorded but never published.

[55] Child, "A Backward Glance," 12.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Jane Coppock and Arthur Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," *Perspectives of New Music* 17/1 (1978): 49.

drive to write music, to live a life of music, was not enough."[58] Therefore, he ceased all compositional activities.

Berger's next creative period may be classified as neoclassical (1939–52). The first works from that period reveal significant influences of both Stravinsky and Copland. The style of the later neoclassic pieces earned Berger the label of "diatonic Webern" or "white-note Webern," the terms traceable to Milton Babbitt's review of the 1951 *Duo for Violin and Piano No.1*.[59] These works were followed by Berger's second serial period (1954–58). The rhythms and textures of this transitional style resembled those of his neoclassical works. Indeed, Berger referred to this music as "neoclassical twelve-tone," its weightiest example being the 1958 String Quartet.[60] By the mid-sixties, with works like the *Septet* (1966), commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, Berger arrived at a highly personal idiom, less directly indebted to either neoclassical or serial procedures, but strongly influenced by both. The late stage of Berger's career (post-1980) was marked by reworkings of his earlier compositions and collages based on them.

Berger wrote for piano, both two-and four-hands, chamber ensembles, and full orchestra. He also composed a small number of pieces for voice. His chamber works

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[58] Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 50.

[59] Milton Babbitt, "Musical America's Several Generations," *Saturday Review,* 13 March 1954, 36. An anonymous program note author attributed the following paraphrase to Peggy Glanville-Hicks, highlighting these stylistic elements in the *Duo for Cello and Piano*: "characteristic leaps in the melodic lines, the intensive fragmentation and syncopation, [and] the pointillistic surface that recalls Webern even while the diatonic planning in back links that style also to neo-classicism." Quoted from program note on *Duo for Cello and Piano,* Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[60] *Reflections,* 97.

include a set of duos for various instrument groupings, as well as an assortment of wind, string, and mixed ensembles.

Throughout his career, Berger received prestigious commissions, grants, awards, and fellowships that provided him with time to compose, money for travel, and performance and recording opportunities. Among these were commissions from CBS, Dimitri Mitropoulos, the Louisville Orchestra, the Fromm Foundation, and the League of Composers.[61] In 1962 his String Quartet received a citation from the New York Music Critics Circle, and in 1964 he received the Naumburg recording award, which in conjunction with Columbia Records provided for the recording and commercial distribution of *Chamber Music for Thirteen Players* (1956) and *Three Pieces for Two Pianos* (1961). Throughout his lifetime, he also received an American Council of Learned Societies Grant (1936), a Fulbright scholarship for study in Italy (1960), a National Endowment for the Arts Grant (1967), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1975–76), St. Botolph's Club Award in the Arts (1968), and multiple ASCAP awards. Berger was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and served on the board of governors for the American Composers Alliance. He was also a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

During his lifetime, Berger's works were performed by major American orchestras, including the Boston Symphony and the New York Philharmonic, under the batons of some of the most prestigious conductors of the time, such as Dimitri

[61] These compositions were the results of the commissions: CBS - *Serenade Concertante* (1945); League of Composers Commission - Duo for Cello and Piano (1951); Dimitri Mitropoulos - *Ideas of Order* (1953), Louisville Orchestra Commission - *Polyphony* (1955), Fromm Music Foundation Commission - *Chamber Concerto* (1959); Koussevitzky Foundation Commission - *Septet* (1966).

Mitropoulos, Leonard Bernstein, and Serge Koussevitzky. His solo and chamber works appeared frequently at smaller concerts, such as those hosted by the League of Composers. Following his retirement, and especially posthumously, his pieces have been performed sporadically, mostly in New England.

The majority of Berger's compositions are available on commercial recordings. Three substantial recordings dedicated solely to his music were released later in his life, and include the complete orchestral works and the complete piano works.[62] Throughout his career, Berger's music was reviewed in major newspapers by some of the most prominent critics of the day; articles on his compositions also appeared in several musicological and theoretical journals.[63]

Teaching

Berger received his first academic appointment in 1939 as a professor of composition at Mills College in Oakland, California. As mentioned above, during his tenure there, he worked closely with and befriended fellow faculty member Darius Milhaud. He also associated with John Cage and Lou Harrison, and was introduced to their avant-garde compositional techniques. He would proudly state that he was present for the

[62] *Arthur Berger: Words for Music, Perhaps*, BMOP Sound 1031; *Arthur Berger: The Complete Orchestral Music*, New World Records 80605-2; *Arthur Berger: Complete Works for Solo Piano*, Centaur Records CRC 2593.

[63] See bibliography.

birth of the prepared piano.[64] In 1941, funding for the composition department at Mills was cut, and Berger was released while Milhaud was retained on the faculty.[65]

Berger would later hold short-term teaching positions at Texas State College (summer 1941) and Brooklyn College (1942–43), but found neither of them fulfilling.[66] Finally, a decade later, in 1953, Berger was offered a position on the composition faculty at Brandeis University on the recommendation of a close friend, fellow composer, and Brandeis faculty member Irving Fine (1914–62). Berger recalled that Fine contacted him following a performance of his orchestral piece *Ideas of Order* by Dimitri Mitropoulos, and promised that "with a review like that in *Time* magazine he could get me a good offer."[67] Berger recalls his experience at Brandeis as unique:

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[64] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[65] Berger expressed his concerns over his impending unemployment in a series of letters to Copland. He wrote: "In the meantime, the prospect of returning east is at once attractive, and if I remain without a job, frightening. I do not feel altogether comfortable out here. I seem to have my roots cut off. On the other hand, the peace of mind, the free time my job gives me for composing, the magnificent country, and the proximity to the Milhauds are all extenuating circumstances. But when all is told, I am a pathological New Yorker." Over a month later, he wrote: "Nothing has turned up for me yet, but I'm starting to get used to the idea of being one of the 10,000,000 unemployed." See: Letter from Arthur Berger to Aaron Copland, 10 March 1941, and Letter from Berger to Copland, 25 April 1941, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[66] Of his experience at the Texas State Teacher's College, Berger recalled: "I've never had this experience anywhere—where you're told exactly what you have to do. You have a syllabus, and students in different classes all have to take one exam, and I found that very difficult because I'm very free as a teacher." See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger papers, NYPL.

[67] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger papers, NYPL.

> It was Fine, Harold Shapero and myself, all of us composers by the way, who essentially established the department at Brandeis. The musicology branch was formed thereafter. This was somewhat of a rarity, since university music departments used to begin with musicology and the composers were then, inevitably, brought in on sufferance. Brandeis was unique in that sense.[68]

Berger would teach at Brandeis for twenty-seven years, serving as the Naumburg Professor of Music (from 1962), and later as the Irving Fine Professor of Music (from 1969). His tenure there was continuous, except for the 1973–74 academic year, when he took unpaid leave to teach at Harvard.[69] In 1980, Berger had to take mandatory retirement from Brandeis; as he explained, he "didn't particularly want to retire but that was the time when you had to retire at sixty-eight."[70] He then taught composition at the New England Conservatory, although he would return to Brandeis as a part-time visiting professor during the 1984–85 academic year.[71] He did not fully retire from teaching until 1999.

Writing and Editing

Berger was a prolific writer, whose work appeared in daily newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, and professional newsletters. His first writing position was as a music critic for the *New York Daily Mirror* (1931–32). From 1934–37, Berger was a reviewer for the *Boston Transcript*, and he co-founded, edited, and wrote for the

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[68] Andrew Rindfleish, "Conversations with Arthur Berger,"1 October 1991, unpublished typescript, courtesy of the author.

[69] See letter from Joachim E. Gaehde to Arthur Berger, 20 April 1973, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[70] See Certificate of Recognition from Board of Trustees of Brandeis University to Arthur Berger. 22 January 1979, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL, and draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[71] Letter from Anne P. Carter to Arthur Berger, 6 September 1984, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

journal *The Musical Mercury* during the same period.[72] At the height of his career as a critic, Berger would work as music reviewer for the *New York Sun* (1943–46) and as an associate music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* (1946–53). He also contributed articles and reviews to *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*. In addition, Berger's writings appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Saturday Evening Review*, *Modern Music*, *American Music Lover, Trend,* and *Listen*. Berger co-founded and served as the first editor of *Perspectives of New Music* and had articles published therein. His scholarly writings can also be found in *Journal of Aesthetics, Music and Letters, Musical Quarterly*, *Tempo,* and *The Dance Index*.

Berger's first monograph, *Aaron Copland*, appeared in 1953 and was the earliest full-length biography of that composer. In 2002, Berger's second book, *Reflections of an American Composer*, was published. It is a collection of essays pertaining to the musical happenings of the last century that shaped Berger as a composer, teacher, and scholar. They focus on his responses to other composers' music, which were central to his activity as a critic, and, naturally, to his development in every area. An overview of Berger's criticism, therefore, is foundational to the present study, and as such forms its second chapter.

[72] See Richard Kitson, "Musical Mercury," in *Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (1959–1962)* <http://www.ripm.org/journal_info.php5?ABB=MME>, accessed 17 November 2013.

Chapter 2: Criticism

Arthur Berger spent a significant portion of his career writing music criticism. Between his stint as a full-time critic and his continued contributions to criticism over the remainder of his career, his writings reached a broad readership. His audience ranged from the subscribers to nationally distributed music journals to casual readers of New York and Boston's principal newspapers. In addition to the general public, Berger's reviews were read by composers, performers, and scholars alike. Individuals from each of these categories regularly contacted him directly to praise, correct, or admonish him for the views that bore his signature.

Indeed, Berger's reach may have extended even further than that already voluminous legacy suggests. For much of his early career, he was rarely identified as the author of a given review, and only those close to him or part of his social circle were able to identify him as its creator. In other cases, his authorship might only be indicated by a set of initials, either AB or AVB.[73] There were also instances when Berger served as a ghostwriter, and for a short time he wrote under a pseudonym. The impact of these contributions is harder to judge, as at the time they were not necessarily traceable to Berger.

In his career as a critic, Berger was charged with reviewing current events and writing on a wide range of broader topics. Of the greatest importance to him was using his platform to "advance the cause of contemporary music—American music in

[73] The usage was inconsistent, but Berger felt that the V would be more memorable, and at one point found that the presence of his middle initial helped lessen the phone calls he received intended for the Arthur Berger Valet Service. See Arthur Berger, "Music on My Beat," *Provincetown Arts*, 2001: 41.

particular."[74] It was in this area where his influence was most deeply felt. The present chapter offers a discussion of Berger's work as a music critic, including major publications with which he was associated, content and style of his publications in this genre, his models and influences, and the impact of his criticism on both his own life and career and those of others, as well as on the American musical landscape as a whole.

New York Daily Mirror

Berger's first writing job was at a Hearst scandal tabloid, the *New York Daily Mirror*, and lasted from 1931–32.[75] He was only nineteen and had just begun his studies at New York University. Berger received the position through a distant cousin, Gustav Davidson, a book reviewer for the paper. Davidson was assigned to write music reviews, but lacked the necessary knowledge. Berger was asked to ghostwrite for him, and in some absurd cases, to ghostwrite for a column that Davidson himself was ghostwriting.[76] Although the *Daily Mirror* was a conservative paper, it had little editorial oversight, and Berger reported taking great pleasure in slipping in "somewhat radical" leftist commentary without being held accountable. Instead, the paper's reaction to Berger's increased contribution to the music column was to

[74] *Reflections*, 115.

[75] The *New York Daily Mirror* was first published in 1924. It was a tabloid paper published by William Randolph Hearst and meant to compete with the *New York Daily News*. The contents were considered 10 percent news and 90 percent entertainment. By 1926 the paper had a circulation of 370,000, although its readership had decreased somewhat by the time Berger was writing for it. See George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of Newspaper* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 229–30.

[76] *Reflections,*122.

allocate all the responsibility for the column to him. He was now allowed to sign his work, using his initials and at times his full name. In addition, after Berger took control of the column, he was able to affect a shift in the types of concerts being reviewed:

> This had dire consequences from the newspaper's vantage point, for my interest in contemporary music was such that that when Rubinstein or Rachmaninov played in Carnegie Hall to sold-out houses and advertised in the paper, I without any qualms would make my way down to the New School for Social Research and review [obscure contemporary music concerts]. It turned out that the leading avant-garde composers of New York (and consequently of America) started to buy the low-down sheet I was writing for just to read my reviews of the new music events since none of the other papers covered such concerts.[77]

An instance of Berger's influence while at the *New York Daily Mirror* is recalled in Copland's book of memories, *Copland: 1900–1942*. Citing his review of an Ives performance at the Yaddo Festival, Copland singles out Berger's statement, "History is being made in our midst," as "prophetic."[78] Berger's reviews for the *Daily Mirror* appear to have been carefully read not only by Copland, but by other influential American composers as well, as the literature about them attests.[79] It is notable that Berger commanded such attention while still a teenager, not yet even in possession of his bachelor's degree. The foundation of his towering reputation as a professional music critic was already being laid.

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[77] *Reflections*, 123.

[78] Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900–1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 201. The article he is referring to is A.V.B., "Yaddo Music Festival," *New York Daily Mirror*, 3 May 1932.

[79] In their book on Ives, Henry and Sydney Cowell cite the same article on Copland. See Henry Cowell and Sydney Cowell, *Charles Ives and his Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 110.

But Berger's time at the *New York Daily Mirror* was short-lived. Julian Seaman, formerly of the *New York World*, was hired by the *Mirror* and began vying for Berger's position. He was successful in convincing the editors that Berger often failed to review concerts of interest to the readership or those that were advertised in the paper.[80] As a result, Berger was relieved of his duties by the close of 1932.

Boston Evening Transcript

Berger's subsequent position, as the assistant music critic for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, lasted from 1934–37. This job, arranged for him by the head of the Longy School of Music, Yves Chardin, provided Berger with supplemental income during his studies at the School, and was his first opportunity to share his views with the Boston public. The *Boston Evening Transcript* was a daily, published from 1872–1941.[81] Berger recalled it as "a grand old paper," very conservative, with small print.[82] He suggested that it served primarily the "Boston Brahmin," and was thus intended for the readers who considered themselves to be of "developed intellect."[83] Here too, there was little oversight regarding the content of Berger's reviews, so he

[80] *Reflections*, 123. It is not clear if Seaman had any proof that the readership was unhappy with Berger's work. It is true, however, that by the end of his tenure at the paper, Berger was not regularly reporting on the concerts for which the paper was running advertisements.

[81] "About Boston Evening Transcript," *National Endowment for the Humanities: Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, accessed 10 September 2019 <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84023792/>.

[82] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[83] *Reflections*, 111. Berger also commented that when the paper folded, "the old dowagers here in Boston were very disturbed that they had no paper, because the other papers were so vulgar, and they tried the *Christian Science Monitor* […]. But there was one very difficult thing; it did not have obituaries, since it didn't believe that people died—or would get sick. So the Boston ladies did not have a paper at all." See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

wrote to challenge the reader's erudition and, he confessed, "attempted to display [his own] superior knowledge."[84]

Berger's most "glorious assignment" during his tenure on the *Transcript* was covering the 1936 arts festival in Hartford, Connecticut. At this event, the "high point for me, even surpassing a concert performance of Stravinsky's *Noces* was […] Erik Satie's *Socrate* (1919) with décor by Alexander Calder."[85] In his column, Berger wrote extensively on that work, earning a commendation from composer and critic Virgil Thomson, who complimented him in a letter for being "really intelligent about Satie (which is something so rare, even in France, that you'd be surprised)."[86] Berger felt that it was this column on Satie that would later inspire Thomson to hire him as a critic, for what would be his most illustrious position at the *New York Herald Tribune*.[87] Berger's time with the *Tribune* is discussed at length below.

Listen

After his stint on the composition faculty at Mills College,[88] Berger returned to New York, and in May of 1943 accepted a position as the editor of *Listen*. This monthly record magazine was "syndicated through music dealers (who put their names on the

[84] *Reflections*, 111.

[85] Ibid., 112.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 5.

[88] Discussion of Berger's time at Mills College can be found in Chapter 1.

cover) and [reached] an incredibly large public of some 30,000 readers."[89] In a letter to Copland, Berger described his duties as follows:

> I work on it about 1½ weeks per month (write almost everything in it since there is no money for contributors) and it pays me a fair [wage] for the length of time I work on it. So while it still doesn't solve the whole living problem, it is a reliable nucleus which I can supplement with free-lance work (if I were only a little more energetic I think I could get a little more in the way of odd assignments).[90]

Berger now had the pulpit of a national audience of music lovers. He admitted that he started with a more conservative content, telling Copland in the same letter that he had moved from articles on Grieg and Gilbert and Sullivan to Stravinsky. Then, "after my meek suggestion, I got [the publisher] to believe that it was he who wanted American composers for the September issue (Copland, Piston, Harris)."[91]

In conjunction with the position, Berger was also given the job to "plug new music" in a trade paper that was released by the same company as *Listen* and distributed to music dealers throughout the country. As he did not want to be associated with the commercialism of such a pamphlet, he requested that his name not be associated with this publication, although his wishes were not always respected. He did, however, use the position to push his agenda, including a recommendation that booksellers place Copland's book, *What to Listen for in Music*, in their storefront windows.[92]

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[89] Letter from Arthur Berger to Aaron Copland, 20 July 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

New Republic

In the summer of 1943, Berger was asked to contribute an article to *The New Republic* for a special issue titled "Civilization in Wartime." *The New Republic*, founded in 1914, was far from a conservative news outlet, like those with which Berger had previously associated, and with it came the potential for a new and more leftist audience, in line with his own political tastes.[93] The article "Music in Wartime," published on 7 February 1944, was intended to be a general survey of how the United States approached the creation, distribution, and consumption of music during periods of war. In preparation for this task, Berger consulted Copland, asking his opinion, for example, on how *Lincoln Portrait* and works of similar political and patriotic leanings may be relevant to the discussion.[94] The central theme of Berger's survey was the idea that a nation such as the United States was superior to the enemy—in this case, Nazi Germany—because instead of oppressing new music, it encouraged it and indeed viewed it as a source of national pride.[95]

Berger's other contribution to *The New Republic* was a review of Stravinsky's Norton lectures, which had just been published in book form as *Poétique Musicale*.[96] These lectures would prove monumental to the development of Berger's thoughts on Neoclassicism and Stravinsky's role therein (see Chapter 8).

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[93] Arthur Berger, "Music in Wartime," *New Republic*, 7 February 1944, 175–178.

[94] Berger to Copland, 20 July 1943.

[95] Berger, "Music in Wartime," 175–178.

[96] Arthur Berger, "Stravinsky at Harvard," *New Republic*, 14 December 1942: 800–801 and Igor Stravinsky, *Poétique Musicale: Sous Forme de Six Leçons, par Igor Stravinsky* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942). The English translation did not appear until 1947.

New York Sun

While up to this juncture Berger's criticism jobs were supplemental, in the latter half of 1943 he accepted a full-time position at the *New York Sun*. After September of that year, his work ceased to appear in *Listen*, but continued in the *New Republic*. An evening paper, The *New York Sun* was ideologically conservative, yet Berger was not fazed by the differences in political views he had with the editorial board, recalling that "they were always very good at the arts."[97] Indeed, the *Sun* was one of New York's leading dailies, known as "the newspaperman's newspaper."[98] It boasted top-notch reporters who were expected to file well-written stories, presented in a colorful, yet polished manner. As George H. Douglas notes, the *Sun* "set the standard for the kind of journalism that perfectly fit the mood of an untroubled and self-confident American people."[99]

At the *Sun* Berger regularly reviewed both mainstream concerts, such as those by the New York Philharmonic, including Bernstein's conducting debut, and others that were less-so, like performances at the Town Hall. As a sideline duty, he reviewed dance performances, a task he was not at ease with, as he felt he lacked technical knowledge; but as he would recall, "I was anxious to keep my reviewing job and doing dance was the price."[100]

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[97] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[98] "About the *Sun*," *National Endowment for the Humanities: Chronicling American Newspapers*, accessed 10 September 10, 2019 <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/>.

[99] Douglas, *The Golden Age of Newspaper*, 229–230.

[100] *Reflections*, 127.

New York Herald Tribune

In 1946, after three years on the staff of the *New York Sun*, Berger was, in his own words, "spirit[ed] away" by Virgil Thomson, who invited him to join his team of critics at the *New York Herald Tribune*. Hired to replace composer and critic Paul Bowles, who had left his position to travel abroad, Berger would remain with the *Tribune* until 1953.[101]

The *New York Herald Tribune* was an illustrious paper, only rivaled by the *New York Times*. Its estimated circulation rate by the end of Berger's tenure was approximately 340,000 copies, with the Sunday edition in the low 500,000 range.[102] Berger wrote literally hundreds of reviews for the paper during his time there. Few places afforded a wider audience for his ideas about modern music, and Berger used his new platform to his advantage, as he pursued his quest to highlight the works of contemporary, mostly American composers.

It was through the tutelage of Virgil Thomson that Berger found his mature voice as a critic. Music critics of the *Tribune* worked under Thomson's strictly enforced set of guidelines. For instance, he forbade the review of private concerts, student recitals, and music at religious services, for he considered those performances "none of [critics'] business." Under Thomson, smaller concerts, such as those hosted

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[101] *Reflections*, 112.

[102] Exact numbers are not known and are derived from data published in *Time* in 1955. That article placed the circulation numbers for the daily edition at 400,000, with an increase of 60,000 in the past year, and the Sunday paper having grown from 528,000 to 600,000 over the same period. Regardless of the exact circulation numbers, Berger's reviews had the potential for significant readership. See: "Trials of the Trib," *Time*, 10 October 1955. As of 10 September 2019, this article can be found at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090324234513/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,937231-1,00.html>.

by the League of Composers, could be given top billing over those by well-known performers or those taking place at one of the premiere concert halls. Thomson felt that publishing the latter type of review was insulting to the readership, as these performances were not "news," and provided the reader a false view of New York's musical scene. What Thomson considered "newsworthy" were new works, and he considered the critic a newsman.[103]

While given greater autonomy under Thomson's purview, Berger was not given free rein to pick concerts at will: his docket continued to contain assignments which were not of particular interest to him. Indeed, not even Thomson had complete autonomy as chief critic; those higher in the editorial hierarchy could require reviews of certain events. And, on a purely practical level, there needed to be a review printed every day. Although not every assignment was his cup of tea, Berger was a conscientious critic, and strove to the best of his ability to review each performance with integrity.[104]

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[103] Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson: A Reader: Selected Writings, 1924–1984*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2002), 245. Thomson's reasoning was as follows: 1) Private concerts are not open to public, and are thus not the business of the public; 2) Students and amateur musicians should not be evaluated by critics trained to judge professionals; 3) Churches only want positive press, and their music is not being performed for a critical audience, but for God; 4) Star performers are not newsworthy just because they are famous; furthermore, their public is manipulated by the press and agents who are in control of much of the surrounding hype.

[104] Berger was in fact often excessively conscientious, to the point of second guessing himself. He recalled: "On one occasion during my early days at the *New York Herald Tribune* I confided in Thomson that sometimes I tossed in my bed and found it hard to sleep, worrying whether I had been fair to the artist I had reviewed that night. Did I make a mistake in judgment or even on the most trivial level, if it had been the opera, had I mistakenly called a baritone a bass? Thomson told me he wrote a review and completely banished it from his mind." See *Reflections*, 154.

After the Herald Tribune

In the fall of 1953, Berger accepted a professorship at Brandeis and chose to leave the *New York Herald Tribune* and full-time newspaper criticism. He had aspirations to return to teaching, and cited health problems, a need for stress reduction, and the desire to have more time for composition as other factors that contributed to his decision. He also sensed that the *Tribune* was suffering from financial difficulties and his future there was uncertain. Although he had received contingency offers from the *New York Times,* he felt uninspired and was weary of making the same observations *ad nauseam*, so he entered the next chapter of his career, that of university faculty.

Even after his official "retirement," Berger did not completely leave criticism behind, appearing as a guest columnist on a number of occasions. This included several publications in the *New York Times*. His first *Times* article appeared in 1954, and his last was an invited tribute piece to Copland shortly after the latter's death in 1990.[105] He was also called upon to write book reviews, particularly of new publications on or by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Copland, as this was seen as his area of expertise.

Apart from the *Times,* Berger also picked up the odd writing assignment in other major publications, such as *High Fidelity*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Julliard Review,* and the *Atlantic*. These articles included performance and record reviews and commentary on various musical topics; as will be seen, some of these pieces would

[105] See Arthur Berger, "From Copland, the Gift of Complexity: Copland: Not as Simple as He Seemed," *New York Times*, 9 December 1990.

turn out to be highly influential.[106] Another of Berger's continued post-retirement associations was with the magazine the *Saturday Review.*

Saturday Review

While much of Berger's criticism appeared in daily newspapers, from 1948 to 1956 he also wrote essays and reviews for the *Saturday Review.* This magazine, which by the mid-1950s boasted around 151,000 readers, was described at the time as "hopelessly middle class."[107] It was known for its "conscientious book reviews and literary discussions by well-known authors alongside its editorials, [and] its erudite whimsical columns."[108] By the time Berger became a contributor, the magazine regularly featured articles on American culture, radio and television, as well as reviews of recordings.

During Berger's tenure at the *Saturday Review,* he wrote numerous one-to-two-page articles, many of them recording reviews, but also essays on individual composers or musical trends. Typically, his contributions would appear several times a month, although sometimes with less frequency. One extant letter to the editor from one of the magazine's readers indeed requested more frequent appearances of Berger's column "Spotlight on the Moderns," which featured reviews and commentary on contemporary music: "Sir: Let's have Arthur Berger's 'Spotlight on

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[106] A partial list of these articles are found in Pamela Jones, "A Bibliography of the Writings of Arthur Berger," *Perspectives of New Music* 17, No. 1 (1978): 83–9. Such was the case with Berger's essay on Copland's *Piano Fantasy* published in *Julliard Review* 51 (1957): 13–27; See Chapter 5.

[107] Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 353.

[108] Ibid., 354.

Moderns' as a monthly column." The editor's response reads: "The spotlight will shine whenever there is enough to merit illumination."[109]

The resulting body of work is a fascinating commentary on Berger's aesthetics between the late forties and mid-fifties, and a summary of his distinct views on topics that were not commonly covered in other publications intended for general readership. Berger was charged with reviewing recent releases of "modern" works. Some of these were over a decade old, but either woefully neglected in the recorded canon or recently re-released. The albums reviewed in a given month often had a common theme, be it a composer, a performing group, or a musical style. Many essays appeared under the column's regular title, "Spotlight on the Moderns," but others received more specific titles, such as "American Perspective," "Spotlight on Americans," and "Louisville Moderns." His reviews tended to approach the music through a specific lens, as evident in the articles such as "Dissonance Disguise" and "Creators as Recreators." Composers were profiled in articles such as "Home-Grown Copland," "Two Bartóks," and "Enduring Sessions." Occasionally Berger also contributed a book review or a stand-alone opinion piece such as the polemical "Don't Call It Musicology."[110]

Throughout his record reviews, Berger first and foremost shared his opinions on the composers and the works themselves; if space allowed, he then also addressed

[109] Letter from John Andrew Fischer to Recording Editor of *Saturday Review*, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[110] See bibliography for individual citations.

matters of performance and recording quality. When applicable, he would compare the recording with the previous release/s of the same piece.

It was not unusual for Berger's record reviews to be sharply critical. It was equally common for his essay to be placed near an advertisement for the same album—not always a beneficial juxtaposition. Berger's aim to provide his readers with his genuine thoughts and opinions on the product the *Saturday Review* was selling is evidenced by the conflict that developed between the critic and the magazine's editor, Irving Kolodin. In late 1956, Berger accused Kolodin of editing his articles to appease advertisers.[111] Kolodin countered with a complaint that Berger had lost track of the intended audience of the magazine, writing:

> You are hearing music more as a composer than a listener. By which I mean that our readers are being told too much about how and not enough about what. This is a perfectly valid technique, but it doesn't strike me as what our function is.[112]

The two parties were unable to reconcile their differences, and Berger's last column, "Louisville Moderns," was printed on 25 August 1956. Berger's unwillingness to compromise, albeit arguably impractical, may be seen as a sign of his journalistic and professional integrity, and an expression of his sense of responsibility to the reader as he defined it (Kolodin was also, of course, expressing his own sense of that responsibility as *he* defined it). These attributes were established early in his career as a music critic, as he formulated his thoughts on what a review should be.

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[111] Letter from Irving Kolodin to Arthur Berger, 3 October 1956, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. Drafts of Berger's original submissions are not available in the archive, so there is no proof of Berger's assertion that his pieces were being edited for content.

[112] Kolodin to Berger, 15 May 1956.

Composer-Critic

Berger was a firm believer that a composer was the most qualified critic of modern music. He was influenced by Virgil Thomson, who had learned this approach to music criticism while spending time in Paris. Berger claimed this was one of the important "innovations he brought to the New York scene."[113] Thomson believed that a successful reviewer must be a well-educated musician. The sole purpose of a review was to "report the music life of his community truthfully."[114] He hired and trained his staff accordingly. Following Thomson, Berger described the most important attributes of a critic thusly:

> It's useful to have a practical knowledge of music. Having done some kind of playing is helpful […]. He should know a lot about the history of music because he has to understand what he's hearing. He should have the kind of education that we assume people get when they go out to teach music. He's got to have all that information at the tip of his fingers, and know how the styles go.[115]

Berger also believed that a reviewer should be capable of reading and following a score, and should do so whenever possible. He stated:

> As much as I think every reviewer should look at every score and hear every rehearsal, they can't possibly do it. That is very bad. […] It would be fine to have a specialist of modern music, a specialist of piano music […] but since we don't they've got to be authorities in an enormous amount of things. […] You just cannot possibly know everything about things that you're reviewing, but you have to sound authoritative.[116]

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[113] *Reflections,* 114.

[114] *Thomson: A Reader,* 244.

[115] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

[116] Ibid.

Berger felt that a composer-critic filled a gap evident in the scholarship on contemporary music. He believed that musicologists spent too much time focusing on traditional repertories, lacked education in modern music, and did not sufficiently seek input from living composers. In an essay titled "Don't Call It Musicology," he expressed interest in "exploring 'criticism' freed from its journalistic limitations," commenting further that "in our time criticism and creation have come closer together for [the composer]. The aims of the composer as thinker and critic have merged."[117] He highlighted some encouraging progress in this area, referencing a symposium on the topic held at Harvard in 1946 as an event he believed provided a boost towards the view of music criticism as an academic subject. He wrote: "A decade from now I hope to report progress within the university curriculum in the most serious phases of this field."[118]

As was apparent in Berger's own circumstances, the use of a composer-critic as a reviewer of modern music also served practical purposes. It provided income to the composers unable to find teaching positions and not earning a sustainable wage from commissions. Indeed, working as a critic was a financial salvation more than once during Berger's own early career. As exemplified by Berger's case, as a composer-critic became increasingly popular and well-known, he would have greater access to an inside professional network where fellow composers might offer their colleagues job opportunities.

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[117] Arthur Berger, "Don't Call It Musicology," *Saturday Review,* 16 July 1955, 60.

[118] Ibid., 61. For Berger's review of, and further information on the symposium, see Arthur Berger, "Harvard Opens Symposium on Music Criticism," *New York Herald Tribune,* 2 May 1947.

Berger was conscious of the pitfalls of criticism as a profession, especially the intricacies of balancing the role of critic with that of a composer. A pervasive issue was the time commitment required of a full-time critic, with the corresponding limits placed on the time used for composition. A critic's schedule was grueling. Late-night deadlines often caused reviewers to leave performances early, so they could have the piece ready by the midnight run of the morning edition. At times Berger would work at the press office, where it was most common for the reviewers to write between the hours of eleven and midnight, but to save time he often wrote at home and had a messenger collect and deliver the review before the deadline.[119] Despite his complaints, however, it appears that Berger thrived in this high-pressure environment. Of additional benefit was a policy change that occurred during his tenure at the *Tribune*. The paper shifted to a more typically European model of reviewing concerts: instead of having to submit a review the evening of the concert or early the next morning, it would be written and printed several days later. This allowed the reviewer a chance to consider his argument and verify factual information. Berger would ultimately write his reviews up to three days after the performance.[120]

Berger's Style of Criticism

Berger thought that a newspaper reviewer must play a twofold role of both reporter and critic. As a result, each review needed to incorporate specific factual details, including the first and last names of the featured composers, the complete titles of the

[119] *Reflections*, 117–118.

[120] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

works performed, and their keys, when appropriate.[121] Unusual behavior or size of the audience should be noted, but the audience must never be insulted, as it often overlapped with the readership. Ideally, Berger preferred the larger column format of the *Tribune*, which listed the details of the program before the review proper; this format was rarely used in other newspapers he worked for due to space limitations and financial constraints.[122]

Along with elements such as column length, placement, and the inclusion of photographs, Berger also emphasized the importance of appropriate and accurate headlines. He argued that a review's headline was as powerful as a picture, but it was often written by the headline writer rather than the critic. During his time as a critic, generic headlines were standard, listing only factual information such as the performer(s), location, or the featured composition.[123] Few of Berger's reviews received flashy headlines. Some ran under a permanent column heading, and others contained only identifying information pertinent to a particular performance. Berger valued the ability of a catchy headline to grab the attention of the reader, and thought that when a critic was provided the rare opportunity to headline his own column, it was important that the headline be well-crafted. Similarly, as an illustration would potentially overshadow any written text, it should also be chosen wisely, and

[121] *Reflections*, 133. Berger considered the "three B's" an exception to the first name rule.

[122] Ibid., 133.

[123] Ibid., 136.

particular attention paid to the caption (these were also not always written by the author).[124]

Berger's criticism was written in his careful but potentially difficult-to-parse style. Particularly in longer essays and music-theoretical works, he could be verbose; some of his pieces suffered from weak organization, with unclear trajectory of ideas and limited or non-existent conclusions. One can imagine that his dense prose may have turned off at least some readers. For instance, writer and journalist Vincent Sheean, in a brief and exceptionally terse letter to Berger, opined:

> There are limits. You cannot 'subject' the 'legacy' of an 'orbit' to anything at all, not even the kind of Chinese that you write. Please have mercy. The language cannot stand much more of this assassination.[125]

It is clear from perusing Berger's archive that he and Sheean were at least acquaintances, if not friends, so it is possible that the letter was penned in a spirit of frivolity. That said, Sheean was not the only one who found Berger's writing style problematic. Even his close friend and colleague Harold Shapero noted in my interview with him that both he and his peers found Berger's writing to be more

[124] As an example of the effect of an accompanying image, Berger offered his review of Leonard Bernstein's inaugural appearance as the conductor of the New York Philharmonic, which took place on 14 November 1943. At the time, Berger did not see the event as extraordinary or "sensational," as it is now remembered. He felt that Bernstein was simply filling in for the sick Bruno Walter, who was the one to be commended for the preparation and the interpretation of the program. Berger speculated that the presence of "a double column" picture of Bernstein that was printed alongside the review helped switch the readers' focus from the musical performance to the conductor's debut. See Arthur Berger, "Music on My Beat," *Provincetown Arts* (Summer 2001): 40, in reference to Arthur Berger, "Bernstein Takes Walter's Place," *New York Sun*, 15 November 1943.

[125] Letter from Vincent Sheean to Arthur Berger, n.d., Arthur Berger Papers NYPL.

complex and wordy than necessary, although he did not volunteer whether he or others had informed Berger of this criticism.[126]

Professional Standards and Etiquette

Bernstein biographer Humphrey Brown used the phrase "the most trenchant of New York reviewers" to describe Berger's reputation as a critic.[127] Berger himself would agree, as he had in retrospect expressed surprise at some of the cutting judgments he made in his younger years: "I often wonder how I survived my decade on the New York beat unscathed. […] As I look back, I am sometimes appalled at my nastiness."[128] Nastiness was not an uncommon approach for the times. Indeed, Berger took some cues from Virgil Thomson (a subject of similar complaints), as intimated in a letter to Copland: "I hope I do not appear as bad as Virgil, dissecting a thing coldly and ruthlessly, and then saying he likes it."[129]

Berger did follow certain standard rules of etiquette. When reviewing a recital, especially a well-received debut, he would focus on the positives, such as impressive technique, even if a performance as a whole was lackluster. He found the practice tedious, claiming that "the repetitiveness was precisely one of the things that finally disabused me of the delights of criticism": it was difficult trying to express the

[126] Interview with Harold Shapero, 25 August 2011, Natick, MA.

[127] Humphrey Burton, *Leonard Bernstein* (New York: Double Day, 1994), 195; cited in Berger, "Music on My Beat," 40.

[128] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 40.

[129] For instance, Thomson's description of Jascha Heifetz's playing as "vulgar" had caused an uproar in the musical community. Thomson's account of this can be found in *Thomson Reader*, 192. Berger's comments regarding Thomson's style are located in: Letter from Arthur [Berger] to Aaron [Copland], 12 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

same thing repeatedly without indulging in "literary flights that may be quite out of proportion to the routine subject at hand."[130] If a performance was below what Berger referred to as the "minimal professional standard," he would simply report on the facts, eschewing an actual review of the performance.[131] Overall, despite the tedium, he did not believe that a review should be so vitriolic as to damage a career of a burgeoning performer or composer, nor did he feel it appropriate to be overly harsh towards an amateur ensemble.

Berger's reviews of experienced professional musicians were not subject to these niceties, and it was in these cases that the aforementioned "nastiness" would appear. He commented:

> The time for indulging in the language of invective is when the world-class artist errs or becomes careless, and not because he or she has one bad night, but when the showing is faulty over and over again. […] In such cases harm is being done to a large public that has invested his money. It was an unwritten law among us in the critical fraternity that this called for no mercy.[132]

Despite this, Berger was cognizant of the possible effect a negative review might have on the psyche of composers and performers, and realized that there was a fine line between a merely unfavorable review and a vitriolic one. The long-term effects of airing critical opinions in a public forum could be much more devastating to a composer-critic's relationship to his fellow composers than ideas exchanged and advice dispensed in private and face to face. A composer-critic also had to be aware

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[130] *Reflections*, 130.

[131] Ibid., 132.

[132] Ibid.

of the performer's feelings, as an alienated performer could retaliate by refusing to play the composer's own works.

The situation became especially fraught as the newspaper business began to decline. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was common for several newspapers in large cities like New York to review the same concert, presenting a multifaceted appraisal of the performance, and offering a variety of viewpoints appropriate to their target readership. As newspapers began to fold and merge, the *New York Times* became the main source of concert reviews. As a result, the range of performances being reviewed narrowed significantly. Furthermore, as Berger commented, "its lonely eminence obviously exerts enormous influence since no one can soften the blow by adducing a more favorable daily review in another paper in the event of a *Times* panning."[133]

Negative Review of Peers

Berger considered reviews of his fellow composers to be the most important part of his job. It was in these reviews that he arguably exercised his greatest influence over the trajectory of modern American music, particularly with respect to its reception among the general public. Reviewing peers was also an activity that came with its own specific issues and considerations. Berger had to be cognizant of favoritism as well as of being too harsh with his opinions: the language appropriate between friends and colleagues had to be tempered when addressing the public. Internal politics of composer groups and alliances also played a role, as praising or panning one

[133] *Reflections,* 124.

composer or group might anger another. As a result, Berger's reviews of his fellow composers were both the most satisfactory and the most problematic of his career. A sample of his more notable and consequential reviews are discussed in what follows.

As a composer-critic, Berger often had to contend with a personal relationship he had with his subject and the effect it might have on his impartiality. For instance, after receiving Copland's less than enthusiastic feedback on his critical analysis of his Piano Sonata, he felt the need to placate his friend and colleague:

> I am somewhat perturbed by the fact that neither [of] my […] discussions of your Sonata bring out the tremendous warmth that I have towards it. It has become a really deep part of my experience—you know, the kind of thing that runs through your head and elicits a certain emotion. It may be that shortcomings are more tangible. By the very fact that they do not become part of the unity, they glare out. And so one tends to dwell on them. Moreover, I sort of assume that everyone thinks you're as good as I think you are. Also, people know I think you're good, and they know how much I like you aside from your musical achievements. And I always fear they may attribute enthusiasm to personal feelings. And mainly, words of praise are so cheap now since they are dissipated so freely on so many unworthies.[134]

It is clear from this discourse that Berger the critic had to deal with a plethora of complex emotions stemming from Berger the person when attempting to produce an impartial and credible response to his colleagues' works. He did not always find a successful balance.

When a negative review is the only review, its consequences can be far-reaching. But even when there were many reviews, a negative one could have long-term repercussions. As an example of such repercussions, Berger's critical review of David Diamond's Clarinet Quintet, published on 11 March 1952 in the *New York*

[134] Letter from Arthur [Berger] to Aaron [Copland], 12 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

Herald Tribune, not only affected the personal and professional relationship between the two composers, but also arguably had a detrimental effect on Diamond's career.

Berger was initially an advocate of Diamond's music. In a 1950 article in the *Saturday Review* he referred to him as one of the "most accomplished younger Americans."[135] A few years earlier, circa 1944, it appears that Berger also proposed writing a book on Diamond and his music, though Diamond declined the offer, writing: "I don't like the idea of a book much now. Not now anyway. Please forgive this quickly."[136]

Their relationship changed with the publication of Berger's 1952 review of the Clarinet Quintet for the *Tribune*, in which he referred to the piece as "disappointing." Berger claimed that Diamond was unable to "exploit the special possibilities" of the instrumentation, and pointed out the score's more serious deficiency:

> It is hard to know what this work is all about. The thematic content is rather neutral, and the connecting thread between passages of unpredictably changing tempo quite evades one. Diamond seems to be in some sort of a transition towards a more chromatic style, responding, one suspects, to the growing influence of the atonal composers. But it is not quite clear where this is leading him, or whether he quite understands the implications of the direction he is trying to take.[137]

The review infuriated Diamond. An irate letter to Berger contains the following tirade:

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[135] Arthur Berger, "Enduring Sessions," *Saturday Review*, 26 August 1950, 58.

[136] Letter from David Diamond to Arthur Berger, n.d., Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[137] Arthur Berger, "Musicians Guild," *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 March 1952.

> Too much concert reviewing, Arthur. Don't blame me if you are beginning to develop symptoms of fatigue and numbness of the ear-drums. And too, what presumption on your part, after more than twenty years that I have been a dedicated and practicing composer and have proven my abilities many times (it is very enlightening to know that critics outside of NY are much more tolerant of my work, so that I am not wholly wrong in feeling that personal envy is responsible for much recent attack on my works), for you to write so irresponsibly (because you fail-on first hearing-to grasp and understand) that it is not clear where a more chromatic idiom is leading me; and worse still, that I quite don't understand the implication of the direction I am taking. I am glad that you are Arthur. I am glad that you're so sure! [Underlines are in the original.][138]

Diamond was not only angered by the content of the review, but by the fact that Berger was the one to levy such criticism against him. Olin Downes panned the piece as well, but Diamond dismissed Downes's opinion as that of a mere critic. Berger was a fellow composer—a peer—and thus held to a higher standard. In fact, elsewhere in the letter Diamond aims to insult Berger by referring to him solely as a critic: "You critics prefer to put the blame on the composer by calling him an 'uneven' composer when all the time it is your own inability to hear and perceive that is to blame."[139]

The quintet review ruined the friendship and working relationship between the two composers. Earlier, Diamond had dedicated a manuscript to Berger, but the review left him so distraught that he went to Berger's home demanding that he return it. He subsequently rescinded the dedication.[140]

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[138] Letter from David Diamond to Arthur Berger, 15 March 1952, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[139] Ibid.

[140] *Reflections*, 227.

The repercussions may have been much deeper for Diamond, and possibly had other long-term effects. For example, it appears that Berger did not advocate for Diamond on any of the multiple occasions when the latter applied for a teaching position at Brandeis, nor did he support him in his quest to receive the Brandeis Music Award.[141] In a letter dated 2 May 1963, Bernstein wrote to Diamond: "I've been working on Brandeis for you. […] I suspect that Berger still harbors some ancient grudges; but I approached President Sacher directly, and he informs me that he would like you to come in for an interview."[142] Diamond did not receive the award or the position, a fact that he would never let Berger forget. Even in their correspondence long after their retirements, he implied strongly that Berger was the reason his candidacy had been rejected.

In addition, whatever both parties may have claimed years later, the topic of the review remained a point of contention. In a letter to Berger written in 1972, Diamond claimed that he retained "very little bitterness," but he not only mentioned the 1952 review, he also stated: "In my book I only very mildly whip you for severely whipping me after the Clarinet Quintet premiere."[143] In 1977 Diamond resurrected the issue, announcing that he was participating in a radio show on the topic of "the deafness or maliciousness of critics in their reviews of the works after their

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[141] Letter from David Diamond to Arthur Berger, 18 November 1972, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. There is evidence that Diamond had tumultuous relationships with many of his fellow composers, such as Bernstein, which can be seen from the correspondence between the two, housed at the Leonard Bernstein Collection, Library of Congress.

[142] Letter from Leonard Bernstein to David Diamond, 2 May 1963. Printed in *The Leonard Bernstein Letters*, ed. Nigel Simone (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[143] Letter from David Diamond to Arthur Berger, 18 November 1972, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

premières," a topic which caused him once again to write to Berger about the review.[144] A few lines of text that so angered Diamond were seemingly inconsequential in the scope of Berger's critical output, yet their effect proved deeply damaging to Diamond. This serves as another example of the power Berger held as a critic.

Berger did not just heap criticism on his peers. He also would, albeit in a more decorous manner, occasionally critique some of the composers he most admired, and whose displeasure could have profound repercussions on his own career. Of these, he was most concerned with Stravinsky and Copland. While an in-depth discussion of Berger's relationship with these two composers will be explored in detail later in this study, a sample of such criticism may prove illuminating here.

For example, in his review of a 1936 performance of Stravinsky's *Les Noces,* Berger critiques the piece as becoming tiresome due to the "constant display of animal spirit without real lyrical contrast."[145] It should be noted that at this early point in his career Berger was not yet personally acquainted with Stravinsky, and may have felt free to criticize him from afar.

This was not the case with the aforementioned 1943 review of Copland's Piano Sonata that Berger wrote for the *Partisan Review.* Aware that Copland might not find the review to his liking, he neglected to warn him of it for fear of potential

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[144] Letter from David Diamond to Arthur Berger, 4 August 1977, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[145] "Communion of the Arts at Hartford," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 17 February 1936, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

repercussions. The article did not go unnoticed, however, and on 10 April 1943, Copland penned a letter that begins:

> The other night, while walking down Hollywood Blvd., I happened on a copy of the *Partisan Review*. Imagine my surprise when I came upon your piece on the Sonata. I wonder what made you not tell me about it—just neglect? Or was it "fright" at my reaction? Anyway it was lots of fun to be surprised like that. Subsequently Victor [Kraft] wrote me that you had mentioned it to me.[146]

It is unlikely that Berger merely forgot. In a letter dated 12 April 1943, he blames his lack of communication on a mix of "a certain fright as to your reaction" and procrastination, and admits that he had asked Kraft to inform him of the article, which did not happen.[147] Still, trepidation aside, when Berger held a strong opinion about something, he was clearly not shy about expressing it. This contributed to his credibility as a critic.

Positive Review of Peers

Despite Berger's desire to be unbiased in his criticism, close personal relationships continued to present professional challenges. In the cases cited above, Berger was sometimes critical of peers, but on at least one occasion, he was more effusive than he might perhaps otherwise have been. In his review of Harold Shapero's Piano Sonata, it was a spectacle in the concert hall that caused Berger to temporarily lose his impartiality with respect to the work of his friend.

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[146] Letter from Aaron Copland to Arthur Berger, 10 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[147] Letter from Arthur Berger to Aaron Copland, 12 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The article juxtaposes Copland's serious versus his populist works, a topic that Berger would revisit frequently throughout his lifetime, remaining constant in his argument whether or not Copland agreed with him. For details, see Chapter 5.

On 4 March 1949 the *Tribune* ran a review titled "League of Composers." The concert featured Leon Kirchner's *Duo for Violin and Piano*, a Sonata by Edmund Haines, a violin piece by John Lessard, and Harold Shapero's Piano Sonata.[148] The concert proved a memorable one: it featured George Perle shouting out, in a pejorative manner, "Viva Beethoven!" at the conclusion of Shapero's work. The outburst, which would have long-term repercussions for Shapero's subsequent career and compositional output, caused a stir among the compositional community.[149] In response, Berger defended his friend, dedicating a significant portion of his column to the piece. He later recalled: "I was so excited over the Shapero and antagonized by the rowdy dissidents that I bent backwards and downplayed the other works on the program, particularly the […] Kirchner."[150] The column publicly solidified Berger's loyalty to Shapero and tolerance, if not support, for his neo-Romantic tendencies, but its neglect of Kirchner's work was seen as a veiled insult and an unprofessional

[148] Arthur V. Berger, "League of Composers," *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 March 1949.

[149] *Reflections*, 76. Shapero returned to this incident frequently in my interview with him.

[150] Berger wrote: "Shapero is a personality with musical strength enough to trouble one when he is problematic. His half-hour-long piano sonata was hissed Sunday by some because of its frank reversion to Beethoven (the loftiest, late Beethoven). Even regarded as a stage, and a very valuable one in his own development, it is a major effort, and it took courage to write it after contributing, in his earlier works, a personal quality that has already exerted an influence on some of his fellow musicians of his own youth. The sonata has striking inspirations, notably in the first movement before he bows so completely to Beethoven's harmonic processes. But composers use new materials not simply to avoid a new Beethoven sonata, which would be just as great now as it would have been a century ago. They do so because they need some prop to rivet them to paths allowing for adventure and surprise in the internal relations and to avoid being carried along by their own momentum, as Shapero seems to have been carried along much of the time." See Arthur V. Berger, "League of Composers," *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 March 1949. The latter quote is from *Reflections*, 115.

move. The result was Berger's first and only official reprimand from his boss, Virgil Thomson.[151]

Reviewing Performers: The Yaysnoff Lawsuit

Given the sheer scope of Berger's activities as a reviewer, it was inevitable that a number of performers would react negatively to a panning, and that some might be quite vocal in their displeasure. Berger remembered:

> At one time for several days, I had to use the back exit of the *Tribune* because an angry contingent, most of them with heavy mid-European accents, sat poised in the front waiting room, ready to get at me.[152]

He further recalled realizing, as soon as he started reviewing full-time for the *Sun* that he should have an unlisted phone number. Apparently, one caller, a well-known violin teacher, threatened that he would "make it impossible for me to write another word of criticism again."[153]

One of Berger's seemingly routine reviews actually spawned a multi-year lawsuit that caused him much consternation. The review concerned two British pianists, sisters June and Iris Yaysnoff, who were featured soloists with the Stadium Philharmonic, a subset of the New York Philharmonic, at one of its performances at Lewisohn Stadium, at the City College of New York. The Yaysnoffs were displeased

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[151] Berger also admitted that he was admonished for the tone of his coverage of Shapero's piece: "I must have had trouble sparring with my conscience, since, while I genuinely admired the Shapero, he was after all a friend and fellow composer in the New England Stravinsky circle, and I was not altogether unaware there was a conflict of interest." He further stated, "[I] had occasion to revise my opinion of the Kirchner in a review I wrote soon afterwards." This more favorable review can be found in the column "Composers Forum," *New York Herald Tribune*, 20 May 1949. See *Reflections*, 115, 117.

[152] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 40.

[153] Ibid.

with Berger's coverage and sued both him personally and the *New York Herald Tribune* for one hundred thousand dollars plus court costs, claiming libel.[154] This case highlighted a problematic grey area in the field of music criticism, that between critical discourse and damaging—and illegal—slander. Berger's defense, for instance, was an argument that his review of the concert was not libelous, but instead fell within the scope of a proper music criticism. That said, he did not deny being harsh:

> June and Iris Yaysnoff, duo-pianists, offered mighty little that could be described as music-making in terms of the concert standards established here. […] The Yaysnoff sisters in their first local appearance, played nothing but transcriptions, and these were such curious alloys and so ineptly adapted to the medium by these duo-pianists themselves that they were even a little harder than usual to hear. […] One might have been inclined to be more charitable to these duo-pianists had they given some sign of virtuosity and pianistic skill in their playing. But their fingers were undisciplined and skimmed the surface of the keys in rapid passages, and the ensemble between them was faulty. More expert duo-pianists are to be found in almost any of our night clubs and the jazz these night club pianists play is of much higher caliber than anything last night's soloists offered. There are so many young performers around who would jump at the opportunity of a Stadium appearance that it is hard to conceive what obliges the Stadium management to scrape the bottom of the barrel as it did for last night's concert."[155]

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[154] "Notice of Appeal: Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of New York, June Yaysnoff and Iris Yaysnoff, Plaintiffs against New York Herald Tribune, Inc. and Arthur Berger, Defendants," Supreme Court of the State of New York, n.p., n.d. This public-domain document can be viewed on Google Books: <https://books.google.com/books?id=jnYVCWYEdJkC&pg=RA3-PA70&dq=Yaysnoff+Berger&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjz1cWlg9rnAhUPhHIEHf1ACTQQ6AEwAXoECAEQAg#v=onepage&q=Yaysnoff%20Berger&f=false>.

[155] Arthur Berger, "Yaysnoff Sisters Soloists, Smallens Conducts," *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 July 1952. Berger's claim that the duo's ensemble was faulty proved one point of contention in their libel suit. To contradict him, the sisters asserted that his statement could not be factual because they were psychically connected through their music, and could play a duet flawlessly while in different parts of the city and not connected by technology. Their lawyers questioned Berger extensively regarding the need for pianists to look at the conductor in order to stay in synch with other musicians. Berger claimed that the question was a complex one and more appropriate for a panel of experts, yet it was irrelevant, as he was reporting on the performance itself, not on the artists' creative process. See Berger, "Music on My Beat," 41 and documents related to the lawsuit in the Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL archive.

Berger was not the only one to respond negatively to the Yaysnoffs' performance. One member of the audience and regular reader of his column wrote to the critic:

> During last night's concert at the Lewisohn Stadium featuring the Yaysnoff sisters, I was overcome with such revulsion against the content and lack of skill on the part of the soloists that I eagerly awaited the Herald-Tribune review to ascertain the degree to which my independent judgement compared with a professional critic's appraisal. Your evaluation which appeared in this morning's edition was so strikingly correct and competently phrased that I was moved to take pen in hand and tell you so.[156]

The reviewer for the *New York Times* also concurred and wrote: "It would be a pleasure to report the discovery of two unusual talents. Such, unhappily, was not the case."[157]

Notably, as the lawsuit coincided with Berger's departure from the *Tribune* and his move to his teaching position at Brandeis, the Yaysnoffs claimed that he had been fired for unprofessional conduct, an indication of guilt. To counter this false claim, the *Tribune* offered Berger a spot as a guest columnist, thus proving that their relationship was in no way soured by the review or the lawsuit.[158]

The most problematic aspect of the lawsuit, one that could have potentially threatened Berger's career, social standing, and even his liberty, was the Yaysnoffs' claim that he was part of a Communist organization out to destroy their careers,

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[156] Letter from Norman Feinstein to Mr. Berger, 30 July 1952, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[157] J.B. "Duo-Pianists at Stadium," *New York Times*, 30 July 1952.

[158] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 41. The following telegram in the NYPL archives sheds light on the *Tribune*'s decision: "Joe Hershberg and our lawyers want a piece from you to stop the rumors spread by your duo-pianists[.] Contact me soon and we can discuss a subject[.] It is quite important[.] Western Union Telegram from Jay [Harrison] to Arthur Berger, 8 April 1954, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

allegedly due to their father's Russian descent.[159] The suit was filed in the early months of 1953—a perilous time for American composers and other cultural figures. At that point, Aaron Copland was already under investigation by the FBI for his suspected ties to the Communist Party; in just a few months, he would appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Berger knew what even an unfounded accusation might mean. He was well aware of Copland's plight, as well as the treatment of other artists and musicians under investigation. During his testimony in the Yaysnoff lawsuit, he himself was grilled repeatedly regarding his political affiliations; required to reveal where his works were published; list the meetings he attended, and the organizations to which he belonged. Although he often associated with the political left early in his career, Berger was not an active supporter of any political party. In the OHAM interview, he recalled "flirting around with Trotskyist ideas" in the 1930s, but that is the extent of his discussion of politics.[160] At the time of the lawsuit, he argued that the Yaysnoffs' accusation of Communist ties was libelous, and fought back, writing:

> I categorically and empathetically state that I am not and never have been a member of the communist party and have not and never have been affiliated with any of its fronts or affiliates to the best of my knowledge. I have always been anti-communist. The sole purpose for this absurd request which has no bearing whatever on any of the issues in this case is to cause embarrassment and annoyance. It is obviously not made in good faith.[161]

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[159] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 41. According to the publicity for their act, the sisters advertised themselves as Russian. The exact spelling of the Yaysnoff name, their citizenship, and their background has never been fully determined, however, and at times the validity of their claims of ancestry was questioned.

[160] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[161] From Arthur Berger's deposition, 1 June 1953, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

The Yaysnoff sisters prolonged the case by cancelling court dates due to illness, and the lack of availability of their witnesses. Berger's lawyer E. Douglas Hamilton summed up the absurdity of the situation as follows: "The Yaysnoffs have again contracted a severe case of cold feet."[162] At one point, Berger even attempted to placate the Yaysnoff through a statement of solidarity with their plight, although it is unclear whether or not they received the message. He wrote to his lawyer on 24 January 1954:

> Console the Yaysnoffs with this little morsel of a writer on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in 1843: "a sort of odious meowing and discord to shatter the least sensitive ear." […] It may also interest the girls that I got a round shellacking from the Boston press, but I feel completely encouraged by my own certainty and approval of what I have done, and comforted by the enthusiasm of my friends and the musicians whose judgement I admire. I am not crossing Boston off my list, but feel confident that by trying again and again it will understand ultimately what I'm doing. If it doesn't too bad for them, but I believe too much in what I'm doing to stop.[163]

In the end, it took six years before the sisters were convinced to drop the suit. Berger wrote: "No doubt the Yaysnoffs were disappointed that they received no publicity out of the entire caper."[164] The ordeal had a significant effect on Berger. It required multiple trips to New York City to attend court, and caused him a great deal of anxiety and distress. To be sure, it illuminated just how perilous negative criticism could be.

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[162] Letter to Arthur Berger from E. Douglas Hamilton, 15 April 1957, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[163] Letter to E. Douglas Hamilton from Arthur Berger, 24 January 1954, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. Berger is referring to his Boston Symphony Orchestra performance of *Ideas of Order* conducted by Charles Munch.

[164] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 40.

Berger Read by the Public

Throughout his years as a music critic, Berger was not writing in a vacuum. Indeed, his extant correspondence with his readers reveals that his columns had an active following. Some feedback he received was complimentary, but for the most part, those who chose to write to him were voicing their disapproval of his opinions or his style of criticism. One can only speculate on his reasons for keeping these letters, but beyond their sheer entertainment value, they demonstrate that his reviews elicited fervent responses, something of which he might have been proud. After all, it meant that his voice was being heard and that it mattered.

Many such letters saved by Berger are quite spirited: it is clear that he had hit a nerve. A letter dated 10 April 1955 penned by Harry Hewitt, both a reader of Berger's column and an individual familiar with his music, states:

> The thing that puzzles me is—how your music can be so wise, and your reviews so bitter. Though all of us, other than yourself, might be the lowliest of vermin, still we are obliged to live & breathe, simply that the degree of our failure might be measured against your degree of success. […] Being a bit less destructive as a critic wouldn't so far as I know, harm your own fine achievements in any way, and might cause fellow musicians to cease to employ the phrase 'bilious Berger' when you're mentioned. […] God has been good to you; can't you be good to the rest of us?[165]

One group of readers Berger clearly upset were fans of solo violin music. In an impassioned letter dated 7 July 1950, a reader scolded the critic for his evaluation, particularly the use of the term "slow vibrato" in regards to a performance by the violinist Harry Shub. He writes:

[165] Letter from Harry Hewitt to Arthur Berger, 10 April 1955, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

> We are really awfully weary of hearing you flaunt your psychotic antipathy to a beautiful violinistic tone with this basically meaningless technological jargon. Your public, if you have one, would certainly appreciate your developing another string on your guitar. […] This petty meanness of critical range and spirit has manifested itself in your reviews so many times before. […] Isn't it possible that you may be suffering from an allergy to poetic sound? […] Frankly, such a distaste as you seem so constantly anxious to display toward loveliness of sound smacks suspiciously of boasting about the lack of the left testicle."[166]

The letter ends with the statement: "Well, we wish you joy in your musicological spinsterdom."[167] While Berger left no opinion on the letter's effect, he was always adamant that he was a composer first, critic second, and never a musicologist. Being labeled such may have been the most stinging insult he could receive.

Another complaint, this from an individual identified as B. Wagner, regarding a review of a performance by violinist Richard Burgin, demanded that Berger acquire a "different point of view," claiming that his present one was "precisely that of […] the village violin teacher."[168] Each time Berger is referred to throughout the letter, his name is printed in large capital letters that contrast greatly with the elegant script of the main text. The author writes: "MR. ARTHUR BERGER, of the N.Y.H.T., must prove to anybody who happens in an idle moment to pursue his venomous screed that no infamous violin criminal can get by with any slips while HE is in the audience."[169]

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[166] Letter from J. Hastings to Arthur Berger, 7 July 1950, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[167] Hastings to Berger, 7 July 1950.

[168] Letter from B. Wagner to Arthur Berger, n.d., Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. In addition to being a performing violinist and teacher, Richard Burgin held the position of associate conductor and concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He was also the chair of the string department of the New England Conservatory and served on the faculty of Boston University. See "Richard Burgin, Concertmaster of the Boston Symphony, Dead," *New York Times*, 1 May 1981.

[169] N.Y.H.T. is the *New York Herald Tribune*. Wagner to Berger, n.d.

It is unclear how many letters Berger responded to, as no draft replies are extant among his papers. It is clear from a follow-up letter by Wagner, however, that Berger did reply to the original complaint, and in a manner that Wagner describes as "gracious."[170] The correspondent asks for Berger's recommendation as to the best available recording of *Missa Solenmis*, and closes by saying: "I thank you for your kindness and courtesy, and intend to refrain hereafter from criticism of your criticisms."[171] It is intriguing to speculate about the potential contents of Berger's missing reply to Wagner, as characteristic of Berger in general was the tendency to become defensive and even combative when challenged by his detractors. Although he might sometimes offer an apology and soften his stance a bit, Berger often quickly reverted to defending his position in a manner that would be equally, if not more venomous than his original statement.

Relationships with Fellow Critics

Berger's fabled nastiness sometimes extended to his relationships with his fellow critics. He was not immune to the fiercely competitive culture in the newspaper business. His favorite style of column to write was what he referred to as the "Sunday column of gossipy notes that was a regular feature in the *Times* and *Tribune*, covering little as well as big events." Berger, who in *Reflections* laments the demise of this style of column, used it to report on contemporary music. As a successful and well-connected composer, Berger had access to much inside information on contemporary

[170] Wagner to Berger, n.d.

[171] Ibid.

music, and took great pleasure in scooping his colleagues. When working for the *Tribune*, this included a friendly game of one-upmanship with the *New York Times* editor Howard Taubman. Berger triumphantly proclaimed that he was able to keep Taubman on his toes, while crediting the latter with having "a unique flair for news."[172]

Of another colleague, Olin Downes, who "pontificated" for the *Times* for over thirty years, 1924–55, Berger's opinion was less favorable. He conceded that Downes was an "honest, conscientious, and hard-working critic," and found himself "comfortable with his liberal views on national and world politics."[173] Berger's compliments did not extend to Downes's taste in music, however. He recalls: "If we ever did agree I would be concerned and reassess the matter at hand."[174] For instance, he took exception to his fellow critic's repeatedly expressed unfavorable views of Stravinsky, while calling irresponsible Downes's exorbitant adulation of Sibelius and Shostakovich. In his opinion, it resulted in an unhealthy public "frenzy," as Downes's readers flocked to performances and purchased recordings of their music, while dismissing the works of others.[175]

Berger was particularly frustrated with those reviewers on the modern music beat who exhibited an open and deep-seated dislike of modern music. He exclaimed: "Take Harold Schonberg […] and Donal Henihan […]. Why should those people

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[172] *Reflections*, 134.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid., 135.

who hate new music go and write about it? It's obvious that they hate the music, yet they keep going and reviewing it."[176] Berger accepted that no critic would be fond of all the music he was required to review. Yet, he was adamant that in such cases when a critic did not enjoy the music, he should at least "know something about it."[177] Recalling how the staff of some papers he worked for encouraged him to approach the review as an average listener and provide the layman's point of view, Berger asserted, to the contrary, that "it's possible that you don't realize the value in something until it's pointed out to you."[178] He believed that failing to provide the reader with the critic's expertise fails the reader, as it is his knowledge that makes the critic a professional fit for the job. If a critic's sole response to a new work is to negate its value without explanation, the audience would not reap the benefits of that expertise.

Models

As mentioned above, Berger's career as a music critic was deeply influenced by his boss at the *Tribune*, Virgil Thomson, and the time the two worked together was paramount to the development and maturation of his approach and writing style. In addition to Thomson, Berger names two other older-generation critics whom he admired and credits with exerting an influence on him as a thinker and writer, Paul Rosenfeld and Bernard Haggin.

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[176] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

Educated at Yale and Columbia, Paul Rosenfeld (1890–1946) was a prolific and influential American critic who wrote on music, art, and literature.[179] His articles typically appeared in journals, magazines, and "small-scale" publications such as *Seven Arts,* the *Dial,* and the *New Republic*, and he was well known for his support of American music.[180] Rosenfeld's short book *An Hour with American Music*, published in 1929, was particularly highly regarded, and was singled out by Copland as "the first significant book on American music."[181]

Berger also valued Rosenfeld's criticism of modern music, writing: "Nobody had then or since written with such selflessness, honesty, and sensitivity about composers who had so little commercial success."[182] Berger describes Rosenfeld as a professional mentor and a staunch supporter of contemporary music, recalling: "Rosenfeld was not only a friend of the artist; he was a patron—literally when he could spare the funds, but otherwise in the sense that he used his columns unabashedly to patronize (in a good sense) the artist's cause."[183]

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[179] "Paul Rosenfeld Papers" Finding Aid, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Libraries, accessed 15 August 2014, <http://drs.library.yale.edu/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?stylename=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=beinecke:rosenfel&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes>

[180] Rosenfeld's critiques appeared in *New Republic,* the *Dial, Modern Music, Musical Quarterly*, the *Seven Arts*, the *American Music Lover*, the *Musical Record, Scribner's Magazine*, and *American Mercury*, among other outlets. He also published several collections of essays on the subject of music, including *Musical Portraits* (1920) and *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (1936). For details, see Judith Tick and Paul Beudoin (eds.), *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 336.

[181] Aaron Copland, "Conversations with Edward T. Cone," as cited in *Aaron Copland: A Reader: Selected Writings: 1923–1972*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2004), 352.

[182] Draft essay on Paul Rosenfeld by Arthur Berger, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[183] Arthur Berger, "Review: The Writing of Paul Rosenfeld: An Annotated Bibliography by Charles L.P. Silet," *American Music* 2, no. 1 (1984): 108.

Berger found Rosenfeld's prose beautiful and satisfying as to its content, yet at times frustrating in its style: convoluted and difficult to parse. He described the experience of reading Rosenfeld akin to translating from a "foreign language," where the very act of translating and drawing meanings from the dense text proved a wholly satisfying activity in its own right.[184] Notably, as mentioned above, Berger's writing style was subject to similar complaints for its lack of clarity and succinctness. He may have cultivated this style due to admiration for Rosenfeld's writing.

Not all of Rosenfeld's views were embraced by Berger and his circle. For instance, he disapproved of the older critic's "distinctly psychological approach," and his "impressionist orientation," loaded with "Romantic notions of [music's] relationships to personalities and society."[185] But, differences notwithstanding, it was Rosenfeld's openness to and enthusiasm for new music, especially that of American composers, that earned Berger's admiration and respect:

> It was in Rosenfeld's columns in periodicals like *Dial* and the *New Republic* that we were introduced to the names of the most significant composers writing at the time—American composers in particular—names that one rarely encountered any place else. His own regard for them was contagious, and we learned to be patient with a style we were brought up to view with considerable skepticism. We had to admit, nonetheless, that it communicated the quality of the music in no small way.[186]

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[184] *Reflections,* 150.

[185] Ibid., 150–151. An example of such "Romantic" statement made by Rosenfeld is as follows: "Music is expressive, carrying us out of ourselves and beyond ourselves into impersonal regions, into the stream of things; permitting us to feel the conditions under which objects exist, the forces playing upon human life." See *Musical Impressions: Selections from Paul Rosenfeld's Criticism*, ed. Herbert A. Leibowitz (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), 225.

[186] *Reflections,* 151.

Berger called Rosenfeld's *An Hour with American Music* "a bible."[187] The book aimed to define the characteristics of American art music, as well as offer a survey of the most significant American composers. Rosenfeld clearly had a strong point of view as to what was to be considered "serious American music," and conversely, what was not to be so considered. To Rosenfeld, serious music as a whole was an art form with an intricately developed structure, including clear beginnings and endings. Also necessary was a composer's awareness of the music's past, and a desire to build upon that history in developing his craft: "For two-hundred years, a succession of great musicians had the power to receive and move a technique onward."[188] Rosenfeld particularly singled out Schoenberg as a composer who had earned a place within the tradition of past masters.[189] On what might constitute specifically American music, Rosenfeld took an unequivocal position. In the opening sentences of his book, he states: "American music is not jazz. Jazz is not music." He continued:

> This is one of the most significant aspects of the national situation. We have an American music: there existing a body of sonorous work, not jazz, made by persons associated with the American community, to be grouped without impertinence with classic European works.[190]

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[187] *Reflections*, 153.

[188] Paul Rosenfeld, *An Hour with American Music* (Philadelphia, J.P. Lippincott, 1929), 25.

[189] Rosenfeld wrote: "There is no living German whose music we want to hear more than Schoenberg." Paul Rosenfeld, "New German Music," in *New Musical Chronicle: 1917–1923* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923), 211.

[190] Rosenfeld, *An Hour with American Music*, 26.

Berger's conflicted attitude toward jazz somewhat echoes Rosenfeld's. While Berger was never as explicit as Rosenfeld in excluding jazz entirely from the realm of American music, he struggled with defining its place within it. For instance, he found fault with and even expressed embarrassment at his own compositions that contained jazz influences. Similarly, he expressed reservations while reviewing the works of other composers that showed similar traits. This disapproval clearly comes through in an article on Bernstein for *Saturday Review*:

> Bernstein's reputation as a sensational all-around musician (including conductor, pianist, song writer, etc.) is not undeserving. But as a symphonic composer he is not nearly so special as when he writes jazz for Broadway, where he assures us, the future of "serious" music lies. We shall see.[191]

While their common attitude toward serious vs. popular music contributed to friendship and mutual respect between Berger and Rosenfeld, the eventual falling out between them may partially be credited to the differences in their attitudes toward modern art-music composers, specifically Copland and Stravinsky. Both were the favorites of Berger's as both composer and critic, and his personal and professional relationship with them will be addressed below. Rosenfeld, meanwhile, was suspicious of Copland, associated him with the politicization of music, and found his affiliations with "leftist" groups troubling.[192]

Another possible reason for the cooling of Berger's relationship with Rosenfeld was the former's essay in *Modern Music*, in which he criticized his

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[191] Arthur Berger, "Music: Composers," *Saturday Review*, 14 March 1953, 18.

[192] Letter from Arthur Berger to [Charles L.P.] Silet, 30 May 1984, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. Berger is reacting to a review of *The Writings of Paul Rosenfeld: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Press, 1981). See Arthur Berger, "Discoveries of a Music Critic," *Modern Music* (March/April 1936).

erstwhile mentor for lacking skill in musical analysis. In response to Rosenfeld's description of his approach as a "combination of criticism and experience," Berger commented: "It seems to me in this combination, something is lost on the side of criticism, and therefore a more accurate statement would be 'the *substitution* of experience for the *analytical* part of criticism."[193] It appears that, as Berger acquired experience as a critic, he began to believe that his music-theoretical expertise in particular placed the quality of his writing on modern music above Rosenfeld's. In the wake of the essay's publication, he apparently mishandled personal interactions with the older critic, turning their relationship even more fractious. In retrospect, this caused Berger significant guilt, and he expressed regret for being unable to reconcile with Rosenfeld prior to his death:

> It was very sad to me that Paul died before I could make my peace with him—especially since shortly before the end I made a remark to him that enraged him so that I feared he would have an apoplectic attack before my eyes. He could barely get the words out and he stuttered (which he did at times) accusations at me for representing and promoting a musical direction that was a disaster for genuine musical values.[194]

The rift between them evidently did not diminish Berger's respect and admiration for his mentor's achievements. In response to writer and critic Edmund Wilson's essay on Rosenfeld in which he was mentioned, Berger's excitement is palpable: "Here I was, after all, someone who had recently knelt at his feet, now being placed at his

[193] Arthur Berger, "Rosenfeld's 'Experience and Criticism,'" *Modern Music* 2, no. 2 (1964).

[194] Berger to Silet, 30 May 1984. According to Berger's letter, at issue this time was a difference in opinion over Ives: as Rosenfeld was waxing poetic over what he identified as a "heavenly" passage, Berger quipped that "any major triad would sound heavenly after all that cacophony."

level. […] I was elated beyond words to be placed in some sort of balance with the one I had idolized."[195]

Another music critic Berger highly admired was Bernard Haggin, who wrote for both the *New Republic* and the *Nation.* Berger recalled: "Haggin had a sincerity and single-mindedness that I doubt very much any of us in the critical fraternity can honestly claim to surpass or even equal."[196] And yet, Haggin was a strange choice as a role model for Berger: he was not a supporter of modern music, save Stravinsky, and "picking on his fellow music critics […] was one of his favorite occupations."[197] The latter evidently caused Haggin occasional pangs of conscience, particularly when it came to his friends. Thus, after a less than favorable review of one of Berger's works, Haggin wrote to him, "expressing concern that I might have misunderstood what he had written."[198] Similarly, after claiming in an article published in the *Hudson Review* that "poor composers make poor critics," he reached out to Berger to assure him that he found him to be neither of these

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[195] Berger's comment likely refers to the following passage in Wilson's essay: "I believe that Paul was right in insisting that every valid work of art owes its power to giving expression to some specific human experience and connecting it to the human ideal. For musicians it must of course be profitable to read the kind of score-by-score study that has been made by Albert [sic] Berger, for example, of the development of Aaron Copland; but as a layman who merely listens to music, I do not see that it is easy to dismiss the interpretations given by Paul of the emotional and social context of the more 'abstract' modern composers." See Edmund Wilson, "Paul Rosenfeld: Three Phases: Portrait of a Humanist Man of Letters," *Commentary* (February, 1948), accessed 7 October 2019, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/paul-rosenfeld-three-phasesportrait-of-a-humanist-man-of-letters/>. Berger noted in his letter to Silet that he was especially pleased with the mention because it came from someone as "distinguished" as Wilson. Berger never corrected the name error. Berger mentions that later he and Wilson became acquainted.

[196] *Reflections,* 154.

[197] Ibid., 155.

[198] Ibid., 155.

things.[199] Notably, Berger did not imitate this trait of Haggin's in his own work: while he would concede a bit of overzealousness at times, apologies were rare.

Haggin's most admirable, and at the same time most controversial accomplishment, according to Berger, was the "grading of a substantial portion of standard music literature from Bach onwards," included in his book *Music on Records.* In it, Haggin provided one-line reviews of a broad range of classical compositions available on recordings, commenting on the quality of a performance and recording, but more significantly rating the value of each work. Berger was particularly fascinated with this rating system, as revealed in the groupings of the compositions: for instance, Mozart's works were categorized in a range from "The Greatest Works" to "Uninteresting or Unimportant Works," while those of Shostakovich were labeled as either "The Poor Works" or "The Worst Works."[200] Haggin wanted the reader to realize that not every piece of music written by a purported "master" was a "masterpiece," and that each work should be judged on its individual merits. That said, his partisanship was blatant, and openly declared.

Berger's attraction to Haggin's bold rating system is not surprising, as he himself tended to group compositions in a similar manner, albeit never as undiplomatically as Haggin. In particular, Berger understood the danger of employing such a system when judging the works of living composers, and exhibited a much more measured approach in his writings on Copland and Bernstein, both of whom he believed to be prime candidates for this form of categorization. For

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[199] *Reflections,* 155.

[200] Ibid., 155–56.

instance, Berger was more apt to consider Copland's "austere" works, such as the *Piano Variations,* masterpieces, while his more populist works, such as the film scores and the ballets, were not so judged. This internal rating system comes across clearly in his criticism, although Berger never openly grouped Copland's works by what he saw as their relative significance or value. Doing so would have been impolitic, and might have proved damaging both to his career and his relationship with Copland.[201]

Another of Haggin's accomplishments, which was perhaps even more valuable to Berger, was the older critic's endeavor to reach out to the uneducated music lover through a series of recordings that contained reviews and discussions of the music. As many of the consumers could not follow a score, Haggin created a measuring tool to be included with the record that would help the listener pinpoint the exact moment within a piece that was being discussed. This allowed for a more advanced and detailed analysis of the music, something that Berger found to be of great value. He was also impressed by Haggin's engaging and jargon-free writing style that appealed to his non-professional audience, stating: "Haggin felt that it was the effect of the music on the listeners and their own actual experience of it that was important, not the terminology.[202]

Berger further comments that Haggin's approach had effectively combatted "music appreciation racketeers," who seemed overly interested in force-feeding their

[201] For a more detailed discussion of Berger's thoughts on the grouping of Copland's works, see Chapter 5.

[202] *Reflections,* 158.

listeners terminology and detailed thematic and harmonic analysis, while neglecting to teach them how to hear the music in a larger context and understand it as a cohesive work of art.[203] Berger himself tended to err on the side of the overly technical analysis while writing for general public. He knew this about himself, and admitted that he had often returned to Haggin's work when he needed to be reminded why he was writing criticism and how he could reach his intended audience in a more meaningful way.[204]

After Criticism

Even after retiring from his position as a full-time critic, Berger continued to follow the arts sections of major newspapers, and was quick to correct and question their staff critics. *Boston Globe* critic Richard Dyer recalled: "It was not always amusing to have him on your case—one trembled before turning over a postcard addressed in his tiny, neat handwriting—but he was seldom wrong."[205] Later in life, Berger lamented many of the changes that occurred in the newspaper business, reflected in their critical columns. In a 1987 interview with Bruce Duffie, then an announcer and producer at Chicago's classical radio station WNIB, Berger admitted to knowing of no contemporary critics who were of the same caliber as Virgil Thomson, Lawrence Gilman, and Paul Rosenfeld. At the same time, he noted approvingly that critics

[203] *Reflections*, 157. Virgil Thomson had written about the "Appreciation-racket" in *The State of Music* (Second edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1962 [1939]), 111-124.

[204] *Reflections*, 157.

[205] Martin Anderson, "Arthur Berger: Perfectionist Composer and Critic," *The Independent*, 16 October 2003.

were given more column space, and had the freedom to write about a greater number of the more obscure performances.[206] Compared to his days working under Thomson, he saw this freedom as an opportunity for more modern music to be reviewed. On the other hand, he also expressed apprehension that such a freedom of choice might result instead in the replacement of the coverage of serious music by the "longhair music columnist" with reviews of popular music, dance, and what he referred to as "crossover" events.[207] He mourned defunct newspapers and journals, and the demise of review columns in continuing ones, such as *Modern Music*, *Musical Quarterly*, *Saturday Review, Musical Courier, Nation, New Republic,* and *Dial*. While acknowledging that the *New York Times* and *New Yorker* still covered the New York cultural scene, as did major newspapers in other big cities for their local events, Berger found the coverage sporadic and unpredictable.[208]

As he evaluated his time as a critic in *Reflections*, Berger mused: "Looking back at what I wrote I am impressed with the touch of a certain bravado which I doubt very much I could summon up now."[209] He refers to concert reviewing as "a kind of improvisatory activity," and comments somewhat wistfully on his surviving archive of clippings:

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[206] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

[207] *Reflections,* 134 and 127.

[208] Berger, "Music on My Beat," 41.

[209] *Reflections,* 231.

As I look back at my reviews, at the clippings of them that I saved in my scrapbook and that have not disintegrated because of being improperly stored, I surprise myself at the things that came up, things that I let pass. It is not only through deterioration that I lack copies of much that I have written, but also because there were so many times when events reviewed were so pedestrian that it scarcely seemed worth the effort to save any record of them. The habit of not cutting and pasting these reviews carried over so that for long stretches at a time I did not save any. I cannot help feeling that the many words I have written for newspapers are like ashes tossed into the sea.[210]

[210] *Reflections*, 231

Chapter 3: Perspectives of New Music

Arthur Berger's contribution to discourse in music went far beyond his writings for general readership. He also contributed much to the scholarly conversation, particularly through his pivotal role in the formation of the journal *Perspectives of New Music.* A co-founder of the journal, Berger served as its chief editor for the first three issues before relinquishing the position in frustration over logistical problems brought about in part by philosophical disagreements. Subsequently, he remained a member of its editorial board and a frequent contributor. The tumultuous history of Berger's involvement with *Perspectives* provides important insights into Berger as a person, an editor, and a scholar.

Proposing "Perspectives"

In 1961 composer and theorist Benjamin Boretz submitted to the Fromm Foundation a proposal for a new "magazine."[211] The idea for a new journal of modern music first came to Boretz when he was Berger's graduate student at Brandeis. Berger, who had himself spearheaded and edited *Musical Mercury* while a student at Harvard, claimed to have given Boretz the impetus to pursue the project.[212] Although Boretz's attempt to start a journal at Brandeis was unsuccessful, he was able to gain support for his idea during his Ph.D. studies at Princeton University.

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[211] The proposal itself does not specify the organization from which they sought the grant, but the venture was ultimately funded by a grant from the Fromm Foundation. Thus, while the proposal may have also been submitted elsewhere, it was at least submitted to the latter organization. Although today *Perspectives of New Music* is identified as a journal, in their communications Berger and Boretz referred to it as a magazine.

[212] *Reflections*, 139.

The proposal was signed by Boretz alone, and the extent, if any, of Berger's direct involvement with it is unclear; nothing suggests it but the resemblance of its ideas to Berger's at the time and the association of the two in planning the journal. Notably, Berger referred to the proposal as "your[s]" in a remark to Boretz that was printed in a three-way retrospective conversation later published in *Perspectives*.[213] The proposal itself is located in Berger's archive, so it is clear that he was at minimum aware of its contents, and it was clearly a model for the formation of the inaugural issues of the journal. Therefore, its contents will be discussed here.

The publication's stated goal was to provide an outlet for scholarship on contemporary composition and composers, filling the void left by the long-defunct journal *Modern Music*.[214] Commenting on the existing journals, Boretz described *Musical America*, *Musical Courier,* and *Etude* as too populist and commercial. Among the scholarly journals, Boretz saw *Musical Quarterly* as covering a scope of topics too broad to give contemporary music the in-depth coverage he sought, in addition to finding its connection to a major publisher problematic.[215] *Journal of the*

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[213] Arthur Berger, Benjamin Boretz, Marjorie Tichenor, "Benjamin Boretz: A Conversation about Perspectives," *Perspectives of New Music* 25 no. 1/2, (1987): 593.

[214] Benjamin Boretz, "Proposal for a New Music Magazine," Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. *Modern Music*, published in New York as the *League of Composers Review* from February 1924 through January 1925, was renamed in April 1925, and remained so until the release of the final issue in fall 1946. The goal of the journal was to educate the professional musician and the listening public on the development and styles of twentieth-century music. See "Modern Music," Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals, accessed 11 December 2013, <http://www.ripm.org/journal_info.php5?ABB=MMU>.

[215] The passage on the *Musical Quarterly* in the proposal reads as follows: "The *Musical Quarterly*, a serious, but general publication which, while it includes a brief section entitled 'current chronicle,' devoted to a few selected reports of significant premieres, as well as occasional articles on contemporary composers, is handicapped for the present purpose by its prevailing emphasis on historical and theoretical scholarship, and by the inevitable tincture of partnership that results from its

American Musicological Society and *Yale Journal of Music Theory* were deemed overly specialized.[216]

The Proposal

The proposal outlines the structure and content of the projected journal as follows:

> First, extended articles by specialists on important problems of theory and practice, on composers whose works are especially significant, on important individuals of the younger generation, and on performers active in the field of contemporary music; also articles by prominent composers they feel to be of special interest. This section is to be organized around a central theme.
>
> Second, a section of reports of significant developments and events from regional representatives at the universities and in the metropolitan centers. European reports can be arranged for on a reciprocal information exchange with such organizations as International Music Association, International Society for Contemporary Music, etc.
>
> Third, reviews of published new music, or recordings of contemporary music, and of selected unpublished manuscripts submitted to the magazine. The latter is particularly important for its service in bringing to light worthy compositions which otherwise might be buried in oblivion.
>
> Fourth, notices and programs of forthcoming performances, publications, festivals, and other events of special interest.

The proposal also included a sample table of contents. As Boretz explained:

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sponsorship by a leading music publisher [G.Schirmer, inc.]." See Boretz, "Proposal for a New Music Magazine."

[216] Boretz, "Proposal for a New Music Magazine."

> The names appended to each article entry are those of individuals who would be approached with requests to submit the indicated article. Two types of themes are to be noted in the organization: first, the single-issue themes around which the first main section is built; second, the series-theme each, which would yield one article per issue. The former type is made up of general topics of special interest; the latter deals with biographical-critical studies of individual composers and performers.[217]

The table of contents proposed by Boretz for the first four issues is presented below. Not included are recurring columns, such as "Report from Abroad," "New Music on the Campus," "Reviews," and "Forecast." The titles related to Neo-classicism and those focused on pedagogy may indicate Berger's influence.

Issue 1

Theme: Electronic Music: Gadget or Revolution?

The Challenge of Electronics	Aaron Copland
The Vacuum Tube as Performer:	
The Basis of Electronic Music	Vladimir Ussachevsky
The Cologne Experiments	Karlheinz Stockhausen
The RCA Synthesizer at Princeton	Milton Babbitt
Mixed Media	Edgard Varèse
Musique Concrete and Electronic Music	Pierre Boulez
Musical Gadgetry: An Historical Summary	[none listed]
Our Neglected Composers – I	Edgard Varèse
Young Masters – I	Heinz Werner Henze
The Executant and Modern Music – I	Eduard Steuermann

Issue 2

Theme: Neoclassicism and American Music

Neoclassicism at the Mid-Century	Alexei Haieff
The Stravinsky School in America	Harold Shapero
Folklorism and Neoclassic Forms	Julia Smith
The Mid-Century "Reconciliation"	Hans Keller
Hindemith and His School	Lukas Foss
The Young Composer and Neoclassicism	[none listed]
Our Neglected Composers – II	Harold Shapero

[217] Boretz, "Proposal for a New Music Magazine." See also the editorial and the front matter of *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1962).

Young Masters – II ..... Peter Mennin
The Executant and Modern Music – II ..... Leo Smit

Issue 3

Theme: New Directions for Serial Composition

The Family Quarrel:
Post-Schoenberg or Post-Webern ..... Milton Babbitt, Pierre Boulez[218]
The Fallacy of Twelve-Tone Assumption ..... Ernest Ansermet
New Resources of Harmony and Rhythm ..... George Perle
Serial Techniques in Tonal Music ..... Robert Craft
Stravinsky Since 1952 ..... Arthur Berger
American Twelve-Tone Music ..... Leon Kirchner
Our Neglected Composers – III ..... Stefan Wolpe
Young Masters – III ..... Luigi Nono
The Executant and Modern Music – III ..... Izler Solomon

Issue 4

Theme: The Composer as Teacher

The Composer in the University ..... Ingolf Dahl
Can Composition be Taught? ..... Nadia Boulanger
New Approaches to Composition Pedagogy ..... Lukas Foss
Nadia Boulanger: Teacher of American Composers .. Elliot Carter
Composers as Teachers:
- Paul Hindemith ..... Yehudi Wyner
- Aaron Copland ..... [none listed]
- Roger Sessions ..... David Epstein
- Walter Piston ..... Paul DesMarais
- Arnold Schoenberg ..... Dika Newlin

Our Neglected Composers – IV ..... Elliott Carter
Young Masters – IV ..... Karlheinz Stockhausen
The Executant and Modern Music – IV ..... Joseph Fuchs

As seen from the sample above, the proposed pool of authors for *Perspectives* included a broad spectrum of composers and theorists, from beginners to well-established figures within musical modernism, at home and abroad. Clearly, Boretz

[218] Presumably this was to entail two separate position papers presented side-by-side under a single heading, with Babbitt representing the post-Schoenberg side and Boulez the post-Webern side.

and Berger aimed to demonstrate their future publication's ambitious international scope.

The proposed table of contents was intended to be a realistic representation of *Perspectives*, and while not all of the individuals listed would eventually contribute—on their intended subject or at all—many did so.[219] Berger and Boretz had, through their professional and personal networks, at least second-hand access to most of the potential authors they had named, and the members of the journal's editorial board had even more far-reaching connections. Thus, while the list of potential contributors was perhaps aspirational, it was not unrealistic. As compared to the proposal, the contents of the actual *Perspectives* ended up significantly less varied, and the journal's scope narrowed even further after Berger's departure.

After an initial set-up that took about two years, *Perspectives of New Music* secured funding from the Fromm Foundation, and was officially put into circulation in 1962. Berger recalls his involvement in the project thus:

[219] While Berger was editor, the following authors contributed to *Perspectives*: Milton Babbitt, John Backus, Pierre Boulez, Martin Boykan, Barclay Brown, Herbert Brün, Elliott Carter, Robert Cogan, Edward T. Cone, Robert Craft, Paul Des Marais, Allen Forte, Lukas Foss, Paul Fromm, John Hollander, Andrew Imbrie, Ben Johnston, Michael Kassler, Karl Kohn, Ernst Krenek, Edward Levy, David Lewin, John Perkins, George Perle, Mel Powell, J.K. Randall, George Rochberg, Charles Rosen, Jerome Rosen, Eric Salzman, Gunther Schuller, Seymour Shifrin, Claudio Spies, Igor Stravinsky, Leonard Stein, Michael Steinberg, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Kurt Stone, Morton Subotnick, Henry Weinberg, Peter Wesergaard, Godfrey Winham, and Charles Wuorinen. Brief biographies of each contributor are included in the front matter of their corresponding issue of the journal.

> When [Boretz] entered the Ph.D. program at Princeton he persuaded me to agree to be editor of his projected periodical and he would be associate editor. I believe my prestige as a writer and my journalistic experience helped, and so did some lively promotion on the part of Milton Babbitt, for we succeeded in getting the patronage of the impressive Fromm Music Foundation. With the foundation as our backer, we had the further advantage of getting Princeton University Press to publish us.[220]

Therefore, Berger was listed as editor, Boretz as associate editor, and Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Lukas Foss, Leon Kirchner, Billy Jim Layton, George Perle, Mel Powell, Gunther Schuller, and Seymour Shifrin as members of the editorial board. The journal's first advisory board consisted of composers and theorists and included Aaron Copland, Ernst Krenek, Darius Milhaud, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, and Igor Stravinsky.

The first issue of *Perspectives* contained an editorial co-signed by Berger and Boretz with the purpose of introducing the mission of the journal. It reads:

> *Perspectives of New Music* has been established to provide a medium for the articles that seriously explore those aspects of contemporary music with which composers find themselves most deeply involved. […] We plan to draw upon all segments of this community for contributions, in order to exchange different points of view. […] Our principal aim is to probe as deeply as possible into fundamental issues that by their nature must be treated concretely and analytically with sophisticated methods, and that require investigation from many different sides. […] Even those who are critical of a tendency need to be cognizant of its premises and content, if they are to offer responsible opposition. […] It is our responsibility to offer, in the pages of *Perspectives of New Music*, articles and reviews that dwell seriously, rather than touch lightly, upon the subjects treated.[221]

The first issue focused on the "relation of contemporary artists to tradition," while the second highlighted the more "'practical' issues raised by recent musical

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[220] *Reflections*, 132.

[221] Arthur Berger and Benjamin Boretz, "Editorial Note," *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1962): 4 and the front matter of the same issue.

developments, particularly in relation to performance, the performer, and notation, as well as their implications for the future course of musical activity as a whole."[222] The editors also announced that the future issues of *Perspectives* would not be "bound to a thematic orientation by the precedent set in the first." They did, however, judge that it might be "useful occasionally to draw together a number of related articles" and promised to "do so whenever it seems appropriate."[223] The caution was warranted: it quickly proved to be exceptionally complicated to secure appropriately related content for the themed issues within the necessary deadlines.

Rosen/Kerman Debate

Berger reported being especially satisfied with his involvement in the debate that surrounded the inaugural issue's controversial article by Charles Rosen, titled "The Proper Study of Music." In it, Rosen made a provocative assertion that "music can be taught effectively only from the point of view of the contemporary composer."[224] He argued that the performer, composer, and historian had become isolated from one another, which was detrimental to the study and performance of music, and contributed to the scarcity of performances and the general lack of appreciation for modern music. Rosen wrote:

[222] Berger and Boretz, "Editorial Note," 4.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Charles Rosen, "The Proper Study of Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1962): 80. This concept was closely related to the idea of the composer-critic, a relationship Berger stood firmly behind.

> The history of music (and of any art) ought to concern itself principally with what is still living and valuable in the music of the past; the composer is interested exclusively in this aspect of the music that came before him—i.e. in what remains alive within the tradition—and his opinion is therefore of invaluable help to us in deciding what to study and what must be left aside as of no value, as a part of statistics and not of history.[225]

As Rosen was neither a composer nor (at least officially) a musicologist, Berger found him to be an impartial contributor, and referred to the article in *Reflections* as an "important statement."[226] Indeed, it would carry the implication to many readers of representing the new journal's philosophy. Some found Rosen's lack of affiliation as problematic as the main point of his essay, leading to a somewhat virulent discussion. Rosen's most notable detractor was musicologist Joseph Kerman, while Arthur Mendel acted as intermediary between the two parties. Meanwhile, Berger remained uncharacteristically silent during the debate. Evidently, he believed that he had already made his support of Rosen's position clear with the publication of the original article, writing to Boretz: "You needn't bother taking me off the hook as far as Rosen's article is concerned. I don't mind standing behind it."[227]

What Boretz and Mendel saw as a political nightmare, Berger saw as an invitation to scholarly discourse, which was one of the main tenets of *Perspectives*'s philosophy. In the second issue, a rebuttal by Kerman and a final response by Rosen were included. Kerman's reply appears to take Rosen's essay as more than food for thought—"There is more than enough anxiety in today's world without Charles

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[225] Rosen, "The Proper Study of Music," 81.

[226] *Reflections*, 143.

[227] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 22 July 1963, Berger Papers, NYPL.

Rosen telling us where to brood next"—and accuses a "certain group of composers," to whom he refers as the "Princeton School," whose spokesman he takes Rosen to be, of "anger" and "polemic."[228] Kerman further took the liberty of offering a list of composers—Roy Harris, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Alan Hovhaness, Hunter Johnson, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Meyer Kupferman, [and] LaMonte Young—to whom he felt *Perspectives* was not targeted. In their correspondence, Berger and Boretz agreed that Kerman's rebuttal should not be published, but a miscommunication, which gave Kerman an impression to the contrary, caused the editors to relent.[229] At the time, Berger's sympathetic view of Rosen's article was never made public. Instead, the editor's viewpoint was revealed indirectly in a disclaimer footnote that releases those affiliated with *Perspectives* of liability. The footnote reads:

[228] Joseph Kerman "The Proper Study of Music: A Reply," *Perspectives of New Music* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 152–153. The published version was not the original. After extensive discussion between Arthur Mendel and Seymour Shifrin, Kerman edited the essay. In a letter he wrote to Berger he explained "[Shifrin] confirmed my suspicion that rewriting is definitely in order; I have labored to say just what I mean by 'school in this context, and also to clarify a number of other things. […] Perhaps my reply is now softer and stronger." Even with the edits, Berger and Boretz did not want it printed. See Letter to Arthur Berger from Joseph Kerman, 10 June 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[229] See letter from Berger to Boretz, 12 August 1963, and from Arthur Mendel to Boretz, 14 July 1963; both in Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

> The editors wish to assure the above-named composers [those listed by Kerman as the non-intended readership of the journal], as well as other interested readers, that Professor Kerman's assertions result only from inferences of his own, rather than from any statements made by anyone editorially associated with this journal in which such restrictive intentions are explicitly or implicitly expressed. As to actual editorial attitudes, it seems most appropriate simply to call attention to our prefatory note to the first issue of PERSPECTIVES in which we indicated that "we plan to draw on all segments of [the musical] community for contributions, in order to encourage an exchange of different points of view," a position which Professor Kerman has had ample opportunity to verify at first hand. We also extended an urgent request, which deserves reiteration here, to our readers to "question ideas they find disturbing or provocative, […] challenge what they read, and respond with […] contributions stimulated by [ideas and issues] they encounter here." But admittedly, we failed to anticipate that anyone would find our contributors more provocative than what they write.[230]

After this statement and the rebuttals were printed, *Perspectives* made no further mention of the article, but Berger was pleased that such a heated debate had been present in the journal's first issues, fulfilling one of his main aspirations for it. The matter of the journal's scope and content, which Kerman, despite the adversarial nature of his formulation, accurately predicted would be narrow, remained a point of contention between Berger and Boretz.

Issues of Topic and Thrust

From the beginning, problems arose between Berger and Boretz surrounding the running of the journal. Shortly after the publication of the first issue, they began to disagree on the topics covered. Boretz was mainly inclined towards serialism and atonality in the early sixties, and in his published writings at the time, he showed little interest in other areas. As agreed in the bylaws of *Perspectives*, a role of the associate editor was to secure articles for publication, and it became a point of contention that

[230] Kerman "The Proper Study of Music: A Reply," 152, n. 1.

Berger did not entirely approve of the scope of the articles Boretz was seeking, which he felt was not of the range agreed upon in the proposal. It was not a surprise that Boretz and Berger had different visions. Berger recalled Boretz telling him during a car ride to Princeton that his "whole dynamic view of music was old hat & [he] had better do something about it or [he'd] be left behind."[231]

Berger suspected that Boretz was being heavily influenced by Milton Babbitt, his teacher and mentor at Princeton. While Berger understood the importance of having Babbitt backing *Perspectives*, he found it hard to deal with him as a "silent partner." Boretz and Berger would both confide in and confer with Babbitt without informing each other, which often led to childish squabbles between the two editors. It is possible that Berger may have been suffering from jealously, as he felt himself being replaced by Babbitt as Boretz's mentor. Furthermore, at Princeton Babbitt and Boretz had the benefit of proximity, and Berger felt that he had become a peripheral figure.[232] Berger's unease with Babbitt's influence is present in a letter to Boretz: "Maybe Milton can [run the journal]—since to a large extent he is the key figure, and with his backing you can really put out the magazine you might find more sympathetic to yourself and your friends."[233]

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[231] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 22 July 1963.

[232] Berger was also concerned that the journal was creating strife between Babbitt and himself in a way he hoped to avoid. He wrote to Boretz: "I should like to have opportunities socially to see the Babbitts alone and re-establish the old pattern that maintained when I was a neo-classicist and our positions were in some ways much more basic than now, though we respected one another's position." See Letter from Berger to Boretz, 27 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[233] Berger to Boretz, 27 September 1963.

Yet Berger continued to assert his opinion on the subjects the journal should cover and the authors it should engage.[234] He recommended that Gene Bruck's "Conversations with Contemporary Composers" be adapted for use, especially the segments on Varèse, Cowell, Thomson, Moore, and Gould.[235] He advocated for the inclusion of an article on pedagogy and music in the classroom. "You and Milton dismissed the idea as too vocational or music ed[ucation] sounding," he wrote to Boretz, "but I think it can be done on a higher level."[236] Berger also suggested that Cowell be approached for an article, "preferably, reminiscences of [the] '20s & his introduction of clusters."[237] While there is evidence that Boretz attempted to discuss or follow up on some of Berger's suggestions, his proposed topics were not included in *Perspectives* during Berger's time as editor or the years immediately following.[238]

As Boretz continued to narrow the scope of the journal, he found that this more focused approach caused a logistical problem: namely, he was unable to procure enough material to fill the journal. By June 1963, he began to see the wisdom of Berger's point of view:

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[234] Paradoxically, Berger was equally adamant about not being responsible for acquiring content, especially since Boretz had gone overseas to promote the journal and solicit international contributors.

[235] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 23 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[236] Letter Berger to Boretz, 29 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[237] Ibid.

[238] In a letter to Berger, Boretz wrote: "Cowell has already been written to; reply pending. […] About the Gene Bruck Series: Do you think it advisable to include Virgil Thomson, Morton Gould, and Douglas Moore while leaving out Shapey, Schuller, and Weingall who are also on the Series?" Letter from Boretz to Berger, 30 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

> But I also think your point very well made, and perhaps I see it better in perspective (ouch!) from here, namely that the one thing to be most wary of is uninspired articles from the Milton atelier, which damage our whole position for no good purpose; can't we find some good Bartók, Hindemith, etc. articles? Let's start thinking harder along these lines, and perhaps we can also try to ferret out some more current tendencies that ought to be known and encouraged. You see, I am finally able to grasp your point in the following sense: that although a wide range of articles from every point of view, we are definitely short on good technical stuff from outside the circle.[239]

Boretz evidently followed through on his new agreement with Berger, as a later letter indicates:

> Bill Schuman, Lenny Bernstein, and Virgil Thomson […] have all agreed to submit articles for forthcoming issues, so now we will finally be able to represent the point of view of that segment of the musical world.[240]

The change of heart came none too soon: the journal's excessively narrow perspective did not go unnoticed. For example, Virgil Thomson expressed interest in contributing only after he had learned of their "intention to broaden policy."[241]

Despite his success in inducing Boertz to expand coverage, Berger was still disenchanted with the journal's main approach. He was unwavering in his demand that if he was to be listed as the editor of the publication, it must measure up to his standards. Yet it became increasingly difficult for Berger to determine the quality of the solicited contributions, as the complexity of many articles made their arguments hard to evaluate under his time constraints. In a letter to Boretz dated 22 July 1963,

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[239] Letter from Boretz to Berger, 23 June 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[240] Letter from Boretz to Berger, 9 October 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[241] Berger wrote to Boretz: "[Virgil showed me your letter.] Just as well you gave an indication of our intention to broaden policy, for otherwise, as he indicated to me, he would most likely not have been interested. As it is, he is interested and has a good idea about writing about Stravinsky as opera composer from his very first opera, onwards. You can be sure that he's smart enough to realize we have a special audience, and you need not force this issue when you see him." Letter from Berger to Boretz, 13 October 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

Berger expresses his concern regarding three forthcoming publications: Michael Kassler's "A Sketch of the Use of Formalized Languages for the Assertion of Music" (Autumn, 1962); Kurt Stone's "Problems and Methods of Notation" (Spring, 1963), and Peter Westergaard's "Some Problems in Rhythmic Theory and Analysis" (Spring, 1963):

> I just hope [the Kassler] doesn't make us look foolish to the people who know the subject. I also think I was delinquent in not following up on our definite impression that Kurt's piece, however valuable (& I must say it is limited), is an AMP plug. Then there's Westergaard, which I am convinced still has errors. But he gets so involved with statistics that are based on exceptions to exceptions to exceptions, that you'd need an IBM machine to check it out.[242]

In addition, he was not convinced that the peer reviewers for *Perspectives*, including Babbitt, were doing a competent job. He wrote:

> It's something like the Kassler, rather, that worries me, since I think it should have been checked by an impartial expert. I'm not altogether sure Milton understands it, since I asked him to explain a statement that I considered contradictory, and he seemed unable to do so.[243]

Berger then admonished Boretz: "[The] articles must be checked out more carefully by referees, otherwise we shall be liable to publishing nonsense."[244]

Berger would later admit in *Reflections*: "I had trouble understanding, therefore editing, some of the articles we were to publish. […] (I realize now that with proper refereeing and editorial assistance an editor does not have to understand

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[242] Berger to Boretz, 22 July 1963. Kurt Stone was the editor-in-chief of the Associated Music Publishers (AMP) at the time.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Berger's specific concerns with Kassler's article, expressed in another letter to Boretz, were as follows: "They tell me that K[assler] is very elementary for people who know what it's all about, and at the same time ridiculously and insultingly pompous in spelling out for them the obvious. At the same time, they confirm my suspicions that to someone who does not know what he's talking about, he transmits and expounds very little." Berger to Boretz, 27 September 1963.

every article published.)"[245] This realization came too late to save his editorial partnership with Boretz.

Logistical Issues

Philosophical differences made up only a portion of the disagreements that surrounded *Perspectives* during Berger's time as chief editor. The respective role of each editor was not definitively established, so it was not clear who was actually in control of the decision-making process on which issue. Not infrequently, the result was organizational chaos.[246] In a letter to Paul Fromm, Berger stated that to remain as editor for the third issue, he must be "invested with the authority as editor, a position I have held *in name only* since the establishment of *Perspectives*."[247] Beginning in September 1963, an attempt was made to create a written document outlining policy and the responsibilities of each editor.[248] The process never came to fruition, however, and no such document was finalized before Berger's departure.

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[245] *Reflections*, 142.

[246] This lack of a hierarchy and a clear division of responsibilities was noted, among others, by the journal's publisher. Eve Hanle of the Princeton University Press wrote to Berger: "I have been somewhat disturbed by the problem of communication between the Press, Ben, and you, and I must admit that it is a little disconcerting to be given different instructions from each editor. As I understand it, originally the editor at the Press was expected to communicate only with Ben about production, schedules, etc., the understanding being that you and Ben would have previously decided together about the matter under consideration. This, I gather, was to leave you free to handle the more important matters of editorial selection and such like. But, it seems that this system has broken down. I would like to suggest that you, Ben, and I get together […] and try to set up some sort of workable procedures." Letter from Eve Hanle to Arthur Berger, 4 October 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[247] Letter from Arthur Berger to Paul Fromm, 7 October 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[248] The letter reads: "As you can see, just the matter of establishing where authority lies, and how it's to be distributed, is already taking lots of time, effort and emotional strain […]. Since the informal basis seems not to have worked, we shall have to try setting up ground rules, policies and procedures IN WRITING, and ultimately send a copy to Paul [Fromm]—perhaps even to the board. (A few ground rules on the emotional level we may write out for our own benefit only.)" This is followed by

The disagreements between the two editors spilled over from the back rooms into the public domain, and the journal's readership began to notice. One example was when Boretz slotted Berger's article "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky" and Babbitt's article "Remarks on the Recent Stravinsky" for publication in the same issue. Berger was apparently not consulted on this decision, and disagreed, feeling that the presence of both essays would make the issue too Stravinsky-heavy, and that there was too much overlap between the articles. Yet publication of both in the third issue had already been promised to Babbitt, advertised to the readership, and made known to Stravinsky. Berger feared that changing course could be embarrassing and difficult for all three reasons, but decided as chief editor to shelve Babbitt's article until the next issue. His reasons, as presented to Boretz, were as follows:

> 1) We get into a rut with certain people and it just gets boring even if it is I[gor] S[travinsky]; 2) You'll have a big article for No. 4 which I am insecure about, and maybe Milton will feel like fixing it; 3) if we have 60 pp. of I[gor] S[travinsky] in a row, after all we've already had, people will definitely talk. Nor were you entirely honest with me, for there is some overlap, especially in the *Psalms* discussion.[249]

While Babbitt was amenable to a postponement, he requested that Berger send him an official letter announcing the change, in order to "protect himself from Stravinsky."[250]

Berger and Boretz also did not agree on the size of the journal. In a letter to Boretz from late September 1963, Berger suggested that *Perspectives* was too long

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multiple pages of suggestions, often prefaced with the label "Policy." Berger to Boretz, 27 September 1963.

[249] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 28 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[250] Letter from Elaine [Barkin] to Arthur Berger, 27 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

and should be cut to 160 pages at the most.[251] Even that number was a compromise, as in an earlier letter he had remarked: "The kind of magazine I'd like could possibly be achieved by leaving out about half of the stuff we print—i.e. by publishing 100 pp."[252] Both Princeton University Press and Boretz advocated for a lengthier publication format, to which Berger sarcastically replied: "Why should a business man think of quality before matters of ostentation."[253]

Beyond the philosophical and interpersonal difficulties that plagued his tenure at *Perspectives*, Berger struggled with the workload, particularly as related to the administrative aspects of running the journal. With the offices of *Perspectives* in New York City and his location in Boston, frequent travel was required. Lack of a full-time secretary and inconsistent administrative support caused communication issues, slowed down the editorial process, and often led to preventable errors. An experienced editor, Berger was frequently perplexed by the short turnover times required of him, especially for proofing, and believed them the result of poor planning on the part of his colleagues. He seldom met these rushed deadlines and felt the burden of blame. The journal became notorious for arriving to subscribers late, which caused additional pressure from both Fromm and Princeton University Press, compounding Berger's stress level.[254]

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[251] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 26 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[252] Letter from Berger to Boretz, 16 July 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[253] Berger to Boretz, 26 September 1963. The business man he refers to is Herb [unknown] from Princeton University Press.

[254] Berger and Boretz placed a card in one issue apologizing for the delayed arrival, and promising that the next issue would be on time. When production was held up again, Berger and Boretz were extra

Through the summer and early fall of 1963, the relationship between Boretz and Berger deteriorated rapidly. Long letters and phone calls were exchanged between the two men, the contents full of accusations and recriminations. Matters both personal and business in nature were raised. At the point of Berger's resignation, he feared that his continued involvement would render the friendship and relationship he cherished with Boretz unsalvageable, although in retrospect he asserted that:

> Underneath our disagreements lies a strong bond, philosophic and humanistic, between Ben and myself, and it lasts to this day. It seems to me this has enabled us to have the most bitter disagreements while remaining friends and loyal colleagues and never losing respect for each other.[255]

In a letter to Fromm outlining the reasons why his resignation was all but inevitable, he cited the emotional strain, and stated that continued involvement would "drive [him] back into analysis [a psychiatrist] if […] not resolved soon."[256] Berger also noted that the combination of his responsibilities to *Perspectives*, his teaching, and his administrative duties at Brandeis left him little time for composition. As he admitted: "Nothing puts me into a worse mood than not writing music."[257] Notably, despite his disagreements with Boretz, Berger was adamant that his own departure must not cause Boretz to lose control of the journal:

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concerned that they would not be able to keep their word and remain credible. Paul Fromm and Princeton University Press were upset that promises were made without their prior knowledge.

[255] *Reflections*, 142.

[256] Berger to Fromm, 29 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[257] Ibid.

> WE ARE MORALLY OBLIGATED *NOT TO TAKE PERSPECTIVES AWAY FROM BEN. PERSPECTIVES* IS BEN'S CONCEPTION, HIS BRAINCHILD, HIS IDEA & IDEAL.[258]

Fromm was initially reluctant to accept Berger's resignation, but finally did so in October 1963.[259] In an attempt to effect a smooth transition for the readers, Berger and Boretz were both listed as editors of the third issue (Fall/Winter 1963). Berger was amenable to this in name only, and in a letter to Boretz he wrote:

> Just for the record I should remind you that though you're listed as Co-editor for No. III, we are still under the old plan where I shall be sticking my nose into the tiresome details to see they are attended to in a manner that meets my satisfaction. In this hectic and critical interim period I want to be sure—EXTRA SURE—that the last issue under my editorship does not suffer.[260]

After his departure, Edward T. Cone and Boretz shared the editorial duties, while Berger accepted a place on the editorial board, as well as remaining a contributor.

"Perspectives of New Music" After Berger

Despite his less than pleasant tenure as editor of *Perspectives*, Berger asserted that he was proud of what he had accomplished. He was pleased with the look and general tone of the journal: its format, the handsome layout, and the "general feel of the magazine."[261] A contribution he particularly prized was the journal's logo: a drawing

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[258] Berger to Fromm, 29 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[259] Paul Fromm was not pleased with Berger's decision to leave, and tried to dissuade him from doing so. In a letter dated 25 September, Fromm writes: "Arthur, you are indispensable to *Perspectives*. Before you make a final decision, let me first go to the extreme in my efforts to bring about an arrangement which you can accept without reservation." In a letter dated 9 October 1963, he writes: "It is apparent that further efforts to dissuade you from resigning would be fruitless. With deep regret and great reluctance, I am, therefore, resigned to the reality of your impending resignation." Both letters are located in the Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[260] Letter from Arthur Berger to Benjamin Boretz, 25 September 1963, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[261] *Reflections*, 142.

of Stravinsky's "recent music," made by the composer himself, and published in *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, where Berger found it.[262] The logo, Berger noted, is "a handsome piece of art, but it has mnemonic properties, and is now, by people in the know, recognized more as an icon for *PNM* than as a visual representation of Stravinsky's music."[263]

But Berger was critical about certain aspects of how the journal was run in subsequent years. Boretz was a proponent of publishing "dissertation-length" pieces in multi-issue installments (this included his own dissertation), a format Berger found unsuitable: "way too long and too big and not quite appropriate for a magazine."[264] In addition, Boretz published a long essay by J.K. Randall titled "Compose Yourself," which Berger interpreted as a work of literature (that is, as a creative work), rather than a piece of theoretical writing on music.[265] It also included the "four-letter F-word." In response to the article and growing discontent over the editorial policy, Berger and a large portion of the board quit before this issue was published, and

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[262] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 120.

[263] *Reflections*, 140. The selection of Stravinsky's art was not without controversy; Berger received negative feedback regarding his selection. Luigi Dallapiccola refused to publish in a journal with the work of a neo-classicist on the cover.

[264] Berger, Boretz, and Tichenor, "Benjamin Boretz: A Conversation about Perspectives," 605. Berger here undoubtedly meant "magazine" simply as referring to a periodical in general, including the type of journal that *Perspectives* was.

[265] See J.K. Randall, "Compose Yourself: A Manual for the Young," *Perspectives of New Music* 10, no. 2 (1972): 1–12 and 11, no. 1 (1972): 77–91. When pressed by Boretz for his opinion on the article, Berger replied: "Creative works aren't about anything. I didn't know what to make of it, frankly. I felt constrained by the fact that I am not a literary critic and therefore I may not be able to judge." See Berger, Boretz, and Tichenor, "Benjamin Boretz: A Conversation about Perspectives," 605.

Fromm pulled funding from *Perspectives* shortly thereafter.[266] Berger would return to the board in the latter half of 1975. By 1981–82 he expressed a growing puzzlement when he was faced with "over fifty unnumbered pages with nothing but artful shapes created by inkblots and, in extra-large print, four to about fifty words per page (occasionally just the inkblot)."[267] The article in question, "Talk," with the author identified as B.A.B. (for Benjamin A. Boretz), signaled a new stage in the journal's commitment to what Boretz called "permanent revolution."[268] As Berger characterized matters, *Perspectives* now included submissions that focused on "non-verbal discourse," and used graphics to achieve "the 'performance' of each article."[269] It was not until 1985, when the journal changed editorship, that *Perspectives of New Music* returned to the more conventionally typeset articles. Berger said little of this change, although he was pleased that the new editor, John Rahn, "retained […] some graphics in the form of reproductions in black and white of paintings and such […]. They helped relieve the gloom of the heavy, gray, scholarly articles."[270]

In *Reflections*, Berger took care to praise Boretz's stewardship of *Perspectives,* arguing that, in tandem with long-time co-editor Elaine Barkin, it ensured the

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[266] *Reflections,* 146 and Berger, Boretz, and Tichenor, "Benjamin Boretz: A Conversation about Perspectives," 605.

[267] *Reflections,* 146.

[268] Berger, Boretz, and Tichenor, "Benjamin Boretz: A Conversation about Perspectives," 604.

[269] *Reflections,* 148.

[270] Ibid.

journal's success. In particular, he commended Boretz's business sense as pivotal to the publication's survival:

> We had both from the beginning been aware of Fromm's history as a benefactor of tiring of projects and people and of cutting off support without giving them sufficient time to recoup. Consequently Ben had the idea of establishing what he called a "survival fund." He would put away a little savings as the periodical received each stipend. Added to an annual donation from Princeton University that did not cease, it made it feasible to keep going.[271]

Although Berger's own distance from *Perspectives* increased over time, his arguably most influential theoretical writings were printed in the journal, and he remained on the board until his death.

[271] *Reflections*, 147.

Chapter 4: Berger's Writings on "Americanism"[272]

Berger wrote widely about the development of an American music, the contributors to it, and the shortcomings of both the idea and the purported results. Reviews of his fellow composers comprise only a small segment of his discourse on this topic, offered to both a general and a scholarly audience. Himself a member of the movement to define, create, and propagate American music, Berger was simultaneously passionate about the process and critical of it. What follows are some of his thoughts on different aspects of the creation, distribution, and role of modern American music. This chapter will explore Berger's comments on what constitutes the characteristic elements of an "American sound," and his account of the challenges that accompanied the quest to create such a sound, as well as other struggles faced by American composers. This is a vast topic, and Berger's thoughts on various American composers are discussed throughout the dissertation, especially chapters 5 through 7. Here, the focus is on Berger's view of what can, or does, make music in the Western tradition specifically "American" in quality. Although Berger's views on Copland are discussed in depth in Chapter 5, they are touched upon here as well, as they are so pivotal to the subject at hand; cross-references are included where appropriate. Chapter 6 discusses Cage, Ives, and Barber, in the context of Berger's thoughts on musical innovation, and his writings about his fellow members of the American

[272] Berger wrote: "I have never felt comfortable with the slogan "Americanism," with its undercurrent of flag-waving, […] we shall find a very good alternative in "national character" or "nationalism." (*Reflections*, 25.) Since this chapter focuses solely on American music, I have used the term Americanism with Berger's concerns duly noted.

Stravinsky School, Irving Fine and Harold Shapero, will be discussed in Chapter 7, in conjunction with his views on Neoclassicism.

American Music from European Roots

While some of Berger's colleagues, notably Carter, Sessions, Piston, and Ives, believed that, put simply, music written by an American was inherently "American" music, Berger himself dedicated a number of his writings to the cultivation of a specifically "American" style. In what appears to be a radio script or lecture from the late 1950s titled *Crosscurrents in American European Music Today,* Berger quoted Copland, who wrote in his 1952 book, *Music and Imagination*:

> In music our problem was a special one: It really began when we started to search for what Van Wyck Brooks calls a usable past. In those days the example of our American elders in music was not readily at hand.[273]

In an earlier essay, Berger had already identified a number of Copland's "American elders," or as he himself referred to them, "the old guard." Specifically, he named Charles Griffes, John Alden Carpenter, and Charles Martin Loeffler, the followers of the French impressionist style, as well as Edward MacDowell, Lowell Mason, and George Whitefield Chadwick, whose music was entrenched within the

[273] Arthur Berger, "Crosscurrents in American European Music Today," lecture or broadcast notes; Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The quote is taken from Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 100. In the book Copland's argument continues as follows: "Their music was not often played except perhaps locally. Their scores were seldom published, and even when published, were expensive and not easily available to the inquiring student." Copland quotes from Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *Dial* 64, no. 11 (April 1918): 337–41. Brooks (1886–1963) was an American literary critic and historian, whose most well-known works were the books *America's Coming of Age* (1915), in which he formulated the concepts of highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow, and *The Flowering of New England* (1936), which was awarded the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for history. Brooks's usable past referred to literature; Copland transferred it to a musical context.

German tradition.[274] He argued, however, that while their stylistic allegiances were detrimental to these composers' development, it was not because their works were insufficiently infused with the "American spirit":

> So much earlier American music which looked abroad for its inspiration was debilitated not, as it is so often insisted, by its sheer lack of Americanism, but by the tendency of composers to doubt their native cultural origins without disowning them, to adopt European traditions without re-possessing them.[275]

Berger clearly agreed with Copland in perceiving a fundamental difference in outlook between the younger American composers and the older generation, whose attitude was founded upon "an identification with the European art work" that, in Copland's words, "made the seeking out of any other art formula a kind of sacrilege."[276] As Berger saw it, the dilemma faced by the American composers of the post-WWI generation was that they "needed a tradition of their own before [they] could even attempt to compete with European composers, who enjoyed long and rich traditions. There had to be an 'American Music' before a composer could have a sense of belonging."[277]

Notably, Berger did not believe that foreign influences had been "retarding the growth" of an American style. He suggested, conversely, that the creation of an

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[274] Arthur V. Berger, "American Composers: Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Walter Piston," *Listen*, September 1943, 5.

[275] Ibid., 4–5.

[276] Copland further remarks that this attitude was especially indicative of the Boston school, namely John Knowles Paine, George Chadwick, Arthur Foote, and Horatio Parker. Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 100. The latter part of Copland's statement is reprinted in Arthur Berger, "Crosscurrents in American European Music Today," Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[277] Arthur Berger, "Crosscurrents in American European Music Today."

American musical idiom was not dependent on breaking away from the musical developments in Europe. He argued:

> If our music is to develop directly and exclusively from our folk songs we must content ourselves with a primitive stage of evolution, with a retrogression to the state of European music in the twelfth century, with centuries ahead of us before we can master large forms. On the other hand, we can depart from a point of much greater maturity if we take advantage of the experience of the oldest cultures, as Russian, Spanish, and Scandinavian musicians have done.[278]

It was thus appropriate, and even necessary, for Americans who wished to compose in large forms to take inspiration and guidance from European models.

Berger recognized that in the process of developing an American idiom, his colleagues followed different compositional paths. He saw composers such as Ives, Copland, Gershwin, and later Bernstein as relying, at times heavily, on folk and jazz influences. The "eclectics" or experimentalists, such as Cowell and Cage, he depicted as spending "sleepless nights thinking up new ways to shock."[279] Still, as Berger proclaimed in a 1953 *Saturday Review* article, one could now say that the American composer had come of age:

> If any attitude is shared by the disparate groups into which younger American composers now fall it is an indifference to the need for developing radical new idioms. The feverish quest after novelty, at its height in the Twenties, tapered off well before the last war. […] In the generation that has just come up, a few are nostalgic for the old sensationalism. But their children's games dwindle on the horizon. Nor is the official concert world any longer scandalized.[280]

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[278] Berger, "American Composers: Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Walter Piston," 5.

[279] Arthur Berger, "Composers are Nostalgic for the Turbulent 1920s," *New York Herald Tribune,* 20 May 1951. Berger uses the term "eclectics and eclecticism" in Arthur Berger "Composers," *Saturday Review,* 14 March 1953, 17.

[280] Arthur Berger, "Composers," *Saturday Review,* 14 March 1953, 17.

This new generation, to whom Berger referred, continued to draw heavily upon their European counterparts. However, as he proposed in a June 1951 column for the *Tribune*, "today composers may choose from more than one highly organized style evolved and crystallized in our century. They do so openly, and without apologizing."[281] Berger expanded on this idea in the 1953 *Saturday Review* article mentioned above:

> The vital challenge [for American composers] now is consolidation of a wealth of musical discovery. […] It is, however, a long time since striking talents have been willing so unapologetically to study, sift, revaluate, and synthesize contributions of composers who have recently illuminated the path for them. […] The most compelling forces acting in young composers are now, perhaps, […] Stravinsky's neoclassicism and the chromaticism of the Viennese triumvirate (Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg).[282]

Berger cited Alexei Haieff and members of the Boston "Stravinsky School," mainly Harold Shapero and Irving Fine, as the followers of the neoclassical Stravinsky, while he identified Milton Babbitt and Ben Weber as the acolytes of the Second Viennese School.[283] He also singled out Elliott Carter as "one of the first [composers] to step over the imaginary barrier that separated Stravinsky's adherents from Schoenberg's."[284]

It was at the time when Berger was wrapping up his full-time career as a newspaper columnist that he saw American composers like himself facing the "vital

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[281] Arthur Berger, "New Forms Less Important to Young Composers Now," *New York Herald Tribune,* June 1951.

[282] Arthur Berger, "Composers," *Saturday Review,* 14 March 1953, 17.

[283] Arthur Berger, "New Forms Less Important to Young Composers Now," *New York Herald Tribune,* June 1951.

[284] Arthur Berger, "Composers," *Saturday Review,* 14 March 1953, 17. The role of Copland and the influence on several names mentioned here will be discussed in the later chapters of this dissertation.

challenge [of] consolidation." He believed American composers to be ready now to embark on a new era, having successfully navigated the dialectical crosscurrents of the local and the international. Another set of crosscurrents, that of the vernacular vs. "classical" tradition, was to be unpacked in Berger's later writings.

Defining an American Sound

While Berger addressed Copland's approach to creating an American stylistic idiom in his 1953 biography of the composer, he did not discuss the topic in greater depth until much later in his career. On the pages of *Reflections*, in a 2001 *Partisan Review* article, and in some of his final interviews, however, Berger discoursed at length on the process of defining and creating the so-called "American sound."

In *Reflections*, Berger identified the incorporation of the folksong quotations as the path of least resistance to sounding American, one that composers embraced much too readily. He warned that the use of this technique was insufficient to their purported goal: "The employment of a folksong is […] no guarantee that a national character will be embodied in the music."[285] Instead, he argued that "what is required if a truly national character is to be achieved […] is that the entire texture be impregnated with what we recognize as indigenous to the compiled material."[286]

Berger also named jazz and ragtime as contributing to the development of the American sound. Contrary to the deliberate (and at times artificial) incorporation of

[285] *Reflections*, 21.

[286] Ibid.

folksong into a musical work, however, he believed that these vernacular elements were not always used consciously and purposefully by American composers:

> There was a time when just the American environment was saturated with jazz or ragtime rhythm […] and it left its imprint. […] And if they grew up composers this experience was bound to manifest itself, taking a form quite different from Europeans like Milhaud and Stravinsky did with the genres of the twenties. For those composers used jazz as they might use any other folk music, preserving their own national identity while borrowing from another.[287]

Additionally, he argued that the rhythmic complexity of jazz, and its potential to undergo a "metamorphosis" in new compositions, resulted in instances where the "origin is no longer discernible, and the impression […] is not one of jazz at all."[288]

Berger grappled philosophically with the integration of folk and jazz elements into classical music. He defined these styles as popular, and asserted that unlike "serious music" or "works of fine art," they were "consumer item[s]."[289] He saw their difference not necessarily in terms of the inherent quality of the music, but of its underlying function, intended method of consumption, and projected durability. Berger theorized that there was a fundamental distinction in a listener's approach to popular vs. serious music. He asserted that, as a consumable product, popular music was created with the "idea of immediacy" both in terms of "its conception and the aim for quick success," the latter predicated on an easily digestible product.[290] This

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[287] *Reflections*, 25.

[288] Ibid.

[289] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>. Berger's thoughts on this topic were certainly influenced by Paul Rosenfeld, although Berger was more lenient on jazz than his mentor.

[290] *Reflections*, 32.

was the antithesis of Berger's ideal for serious music, as indicated by this passage from *Reflections*:

> It can not be stressed too much that *ideally* works of the fine arts are not consumer products. We might start to consume them but we never consume them completely as we do ordinary consumer products because we […] want to return to them again and again to discover new dimensions within them, things we have missed before.[291]

Due to the incompatibility of their functions, then, the juxtaposition or blending of the serious and popular styles introduced the "insurmountable problem of requiring us to shift gears in our listening."[292]

Furthermore, Berger drew a correlation between the time required to create a musical work and its longevity. He stated: "When we consider the amount of time serious composers spend on a work it seems sacrilege to grant it the short life we usually grant a pop song," adding that "we need new pop songs all the time because the older ones are quickly consumed. That this is not the case with serious music makes for a fundamental difference."[293]

For all these reasons, Berger struggled in coming to terms with composers of serious music relying on popular idioms. Looking back, he blamed the political climate of the 1930s for the attraction of American composers of that time to the vernacular. He also identified the ideological climate of that decade as a source of the

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[291] *Reflections*, 32.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid., 33–4. In general, Berger seems to have felt threatened by popular music. He felt that a significant reason why Europeans did not recognize American serious music was that it was overshadowed by popular idioms. He wrote: "And everyone knows when it is a matter of music it is not by its 'serious' products that America is known abroad, but by its jazz, rock, and so on. This, however, spoils the reception of serious music since we have been typecast as dispensers of a form of entertainment music, and music more profound is not expected of us."

debate between the so-called serious and accessible music, a dichotomy Berger grappled with throughout his life. The Depression hit musicians hard. In his book *America's Musical Life*, Richard Crawford reports that "between 1929–1934, 70 percent of all musicians in the United States were unemployed."[294] To create relief for struggling artists, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired them to create and perform music for the community.[295] For composers working in these conditions, the Depression was "not an occasion for esoterica or abstraction."[296] As Berger reflected on the philosophical and aesthetic concerns of that period, he recalled his fear of the "likelihood that a progressive society might demand a more derivative, backward-looking art that [was] accessible to the masses."[297]

In retrospect, this fear was not unfounded. According to Judith Tick, since Congress determined the WPA budget, "political values affect[ed] funding," and "the Republicans and Democrats, Congress and the White House tussled in and through

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[294] Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 590. Crawford does not cite the source of this data.

[295] According to the Final Report on the WPA Program released by the United States Government, in addition to works of American composers being systematically slated for performances, and the formation of performance groups, "WPA musicians served as music teachers, coached and directed class groups and choruses, and acted as lecturers and demonstrators. Music teachers organized and conducted classes for persons interested in music as an avocation and for public schools that did not provide regular music instruction for their pupils. […] Music copying, which was first done to meet the needs of WPA orchestras, was later expanded in several cities in order to create music libraries, which were then placed in university and public libraries." See "Final Report on the WPA Program 1935–1943 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 63–4.

[296] *Reflections*, 18. Berger struggled deeply with this concept, and while he initially intended to apply for the WPA program, he was thrown into a compositional and aesthetic crisis which resulted in him taking a hiatus from composition. Berger instead received a fellowship for and attended the fledgling Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts. See Introduction and draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[297] Arthur Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," *Partisan Review* 68, no. 4 (2001): 575.

the arts."[298] Crawford notes that, as a result, "Depression-era adversity […] fostered an environment of stylistic conservatism and an emphasis in art and music on regional and national subjects." In part, Kenneth Bindas argues, the WPA's Federal Music Project was to blame: it contributed to a "homogenization in American society [as it] effectively muted the diversity of the American mosaic and attempted to meld the country into one vision."[299]

Berger later recalled that American composers, himself included, were faced with "the legitimate issue of whether it was required to 'write down' to […] a dumbed down audience."[300] This went against the creed of Berger and some of his contemporaries, who argued that art should not be altered to achieve widespread accessibility and that creating deliberately simplified music for the masses failed to "elevate that audience intellectually and in its tastes."[301] Moreover, he maintained that political pressure caused composers to feel "embarrassed at excluding the masses when [they] wrote music that they found inaccessible or accessible with difficulty."[302]

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[298] Judith Tick, ed. *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 466.

[299] Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 591 and Kenneth J. Bindas, *All of this Music Belongs to the Nation: The WPA's Federal Music Project and American Society* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 116. For a contrasting opinion see Peter Gough, *Sounds of the New Deal* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[300] Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 575.

[301] Ibid. Crawford writes of Roger Sessions's role in this debate: "While the idea of writing more accessible music attracted many composers of the 1930s, however, others scorned that notion. Roger Sessions, for one, warned against a retreat from 'universal principle' into the 'accident of locality.'" See Crawford, *America's Musical Life*, 590. Also see Roger Sessions, *Roger Sessions on Music: Collected Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 135.

[302] *Reflections*, 9–10.

The "leftist cultural groups" aimed to create a more "proletarian music," a stance Berger did not support, although he did agree with the groups' argument that "'work-a-day music' was not a solution."[303]

Berger further remarked on the debates surrounding the concept of escapism. Poet Wallace Stevens, a significant detractor of escapism, wrote: "The greater the pressure of the contemporaneous, the greater the resistance. Resistance is the opposite of escape which had to be avoided at all times."[304] For some in the 1930s, according to Berger, "the tendency of the artist to take refuge in 'escapism' was bitterly reviled. Around that time the intellectuals were quite concerned about being accused of escapism."[305]

Despite these concerns, Berger felt one should not write down to an audience because, as its history teaches us, "serious" music would in time become more accessible to the masses:

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[303] He mentions groups such as the "John Reed Club," the "Rebel Arts Group," and the "Pierre Degeyter Club." See Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 49. Apart from himself, Berger identifies composers such as Copland and Cowell and poets Wallace Stevens and Delmore Schwartz as regularly in attendance at these meetings. See Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 571.

[304] Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 571. Berger first heard Stevens' argument in his public lecture, titled "The Irrational Element in Poetry," which he attended with Delmore Schwartz. The text of the lecture is published in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, edited by Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, Olga Taxidou (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 518–523. Quote on page 521.

[305] *Reflections*, 10.

> The more specialized and esoteric works of art, which first have a limited audience, often become more comprehensible to larger and larger audiences as time goes by and there is more opportunity to apprehend their content, or after those who have understood them earlier have applied themselves so easily later that it is hard to believe they were ever difficult to grasp.[306]

While the issues discussed above were front and center prior to WWII, U.S. involvement in that conflict alleviated the Depression and encouraged both artists and their patrons toward a more international outlook. As a result, Berger noted, in the second half of the century, American composers no longer prioritized creating music with an "American cast."[307] In Berger's output, as in that of any critic, broadly aesthetic pronouncements were outnumbered by specific comments and concerns. Although he wrote at times in generalities, as we have seen, his views on what made music American might best be illuminated by analyzing his remarks on what gave that attribute to particular musical works of individual composers. The next portion of this chapter therefore outlines Berger's views on four of his American colleagues: Roy Harris, Lukas Foss, Walter Piston, and Roger Sessions.

American Composers

Roy Harris

Berger identified Roy Harris (1898–1979) as one of the pioneers in the creation of an "American" music. As he opined in an article printed in 1943 in *Listen*, Harris's music embodied a regional character:

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[306] Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 22.

[307] *Reflections*, 34. Berger discusses this more in his earlier writings, but does make note of the shift in both his *Partisan Review* article and in *Reflections*.

> [T]he typical western ruggedness, […] which sees past the essential New York gloom to the vast rivers, mountains, plains with their endless resources, which evokes the American people free and good and great, which sings their "fierce driving power" and echoes their passionate hymns of gratitude.[308]

Berger also suggested, however, that "an element which may have contributed to [Harris's] success was a strategic short-cut which he often [took] in the direction of audience approval, namely by playing upon the general sentiments of patriotism, valor, and magnanimity."[309] Despite identifying an "originality" and "force" in Harris's work, he was critical of what he perceived as a weaknesses in technique, asserting that "from the very first […] Harris appeared as a medium through which highly inspirational forces, which he himself scarcely understood, clamored to express themselves."[310] Berger was most cutting in his remarks on what he perceived as the "grandiloquent" qualities of Harris's symphonies. Conversely, he applauded the composer's chamber music, notably the *Quintet for Piano and Strings*, as some of "Harris's finest music," as it avoided such grandiosities, and instead "project[ed] [the listener] into a realm where listening is naturally more difficult, but rewarding."[311] Berger's judgment of Harris's symphonies remained consistent. Writing in 1953, he still offered them backhanded compliments of being "highly inspired" but "uneven,"

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[308] Berger, "American Composers: Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Walter Piston," 4.

[309] Ibid., 6.

[310] Ibid., 7.

[311] Ibid.

and described them as having achieved "the slow, broad, Mahleresque first-movement form of Shostakovitch."[312]

Despite noting what he viewed as shortcomings, Berger's early writings on Harris are generally positive. In the text of *Crosscurrents in American European Music Today* (which dates approximately from the late 1950s), he reflects approvingly on Harris's insights regarding a fundamental difference between American and European music of their time: "Roy Harris […] remarked that Europeans are trained to think of rhythm in its largest common denominator, while we are born with the feeling for its smallest units."[313] Berger takes up the idea, hypothesizing that "it might have been more precise to say we are OBLIGED to consider the smallest units. The American artist must plough as he proceeds. There is not thoroughly ploughed land over which he may soar" [emphasis in the original]. Using the imagery consistent with the frontier aesthetic of Harris, Berger thus constructs a parallel between Harris's theory and Copland's statements on American composers' lack of a usable past.[314] In retrospect, however, as Berger ponders Harris's theory on the pages of *Reflections,* he reports being struck by how little that theory was reflected in that composer's music: "It is odd that Harris's hypothesis in

[312] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* 75–6.

[313] Berger, Draft of "Crosscurrents in American European Music Today."

[314] Ibid. In his later writings Berger summarizes his exchange with Harris: "I remember discussing his theory with him, and we decided together it was not only the smallest rhythmic unit that occupied the American composer but indeed the *single note*, as if we were forging tradition from the very source, starting at the beginning of time." See *Reflections*, 24.

regard to what defines the American sense of rhythm did not seem to have much of an effect on his own music, to the extent at least that I could judge."[315]

Overall, the Berger of *Reflections* had become more critical of Harris's "frontier" persona, finding it to be disingenuous, as his time in the Wild West ended at age five.[316] Still, the critic's analysis of Harris's musical style marks its national flavor, created by the borrowings from the American vernacular. As Berger notes, although Harris rarely quoted folk songs, his works contain "melodic lines with the contours of American hymns as well as folk and patriotic songs," which "certainly helps to yield an American character." He commented, however, that these native elements made "curious bedfellows with the European symphonic aspects of the music."[317]

It is notable that Berger's overview of Harris's legacy in *Reflections* was the first time he had returned to the composer as a subject of criticism since the 1950s. Nor was he the only critic to have kept silent in the interim. In his recollections, he muses in wonder on how unkind the intervening half century had been to Harris: "In terms of what his reputation is today it is hard to believe that Harris around […] 1939 was one of the two best-known American composers."[318] Searching for reasons

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[315] *Reflections*, 24.

[316] Ibid, 22. It should be noted that, although Harris's family moved from Oklahoma when he was five, it was to a then-rural area of California. He also proceeded to spend substantial portions of his adult life in that state, albeit hardly in the wilderness. Roy Harris's portrayal of himself as a Westerner and the effect it had on his music is addressed in depth in Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures*: *American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 227–45.

[317] *Reflections*, 23.

[318] Ibid., 22. The other composer to whom Berger refers is Copland.

behind such neglect, Berger suggested that the European, Romantic grandiosity of his symphonic works might have "lost its cache" for the discriminating listener. He decries the situation as regrettable, and makes the following statement as his final judgment on Roy Harris: "[His] music surprisingly retains an American profile and would certainly be an adornment to today's programs."[319]

Lukas Foss

Among the younger generation of American composers Berger surveyed, he identified the German-born Lukas Foss (1922–2009) as having embarked most conscientiously on creating a native American compositional idiom. Berger saw Foss as a significant talent, and referred to him as "perhaps our most notable 'Wunderkind' among composers [who] recently arrived on the scene."[320]

Foss consistently integrated American themes into his compositions, and the titles of his works dripped with imagery of homespun Americana. Berger felt, though, that such overt Americanism was at times excessive, and suggested that Foss might have been overcompensating because, despite obtaining American citizenship, he was foreign born.[321] Berger described Foss's cantata *The Prairie* as "a kind of testimonial to this country of adoption":

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[319] *Reflections,* 23.

[320] See Arthur V. Berger, "Julliard Quartet: Webster and Hambro in McMillin Theater Concert," *New York Herald Tribune,* 15 May 1945.

[321] Ibid. Foss became a naturalized American citizen in 1942. This was while he was writing *The Prairie*, which premiered in 1944. See Allan Kozinn, "Lukas Foss: Composer at Home in Many Stylistic Currents, Dies at 86," *New York Times,* 1 February 2009.

> The music is extravagantly deliberate in its Americanism, and seizes upon some of the most common earmarks […]. In his own words, [Foss] tried to express the "sunny optimism unique to the country." But perhaps this aspect of the cantata, as well as its excessive length, its overuse of the declamatory style, and the pellets of short phrases hypnotically cast at an audience, may be chalked off as youthful naiveté.[322]

Berger also criticized Foss for relying too heavily on Copland's example. He described the Coplandesque qualities of *The Prairie* as "quite glaring," suggesting that if Foss were to "tr[y] to develop his own material more eventfully, he may find his own inspiration quite resourceful."[323] In his review of the *Gift of the Magi*, based on the O. Henry story, he acknowledged that Copland's "influences do not obscure Foss's personality: […] evident in this score [are] skill and variety."[324] And in Berger's 1951 critique of Foss's 1949 piece, *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, he did not seem to find the American aspects problematic, describing it as "a forceful work, as outwardly American in feel as anything any American composer has written (though less aggressively so than earlier Foss)."[325]

Unlike Harris, unapologetic regarding the overt references to Americana in his works, Foss apparently took Berger's criticism to heart. In a letter from 1947, he assures the critic of his intentions to move away from the "folksy" pieces towards a more classical vein.[326] And indeed, while Foss did not entirely distance himself from

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[322] A[rthur] B[erger], "Cantata By Foss," 19 January 1945, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[323] Ibid.

[324] Arthur Berger, "O. Henry Story in Ballet Form," [unidentified newspaper column, probably the *New York Sun*], n.d., but probably around 15 October 1945. Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[325] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 26 May 1951, 62.

[326] Letter from Lukas Foss to Arthur Berger, 22 January 1947, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

nationalist style, he did move beyond it. Berger's critique of his 1952 choral work, *A Parable of Death*, reflects this evolution:

> What [Foss] has set for himself as a goal comes much closer […] to the fullness and breadth of the great contrapuntal masterpieces of the past. *A Parable of Death* […] left me with the memory of many passages that had considerable beauty and warmth. Foss seems, with this work, to have developed an enormous control over the notes, so that everything is clear, integrated, and in good taste. This is remarkable progress in his own evolution.[327]

In contrast to Harris, Berger did not return to Foss in his later writings: the composer receives barely any mention in *Reflections*. It appears that in Berger's later appraisal of the two, he found Harris's contribution to the creation of an American sound to be ultimately deserving of greater attention. Yet the presence of an American sound, however it was to be defined, was not required for Berger to hold an American composer in high esteem. Evidence of this is found by perusing his critiques of the music of Walter Piston and Roger Sessions, to be discussed below.

Walter Piston

Walter Piston (1894–1976) was Berger's professor at Harvard, later described by his student as "a very sane person" with a "very good ear."[328] In *Reflections* Berger wrote:

[327] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Harrison, Weber, Foss, and Other Americans," Saturday Review, 29 May 1954, 48.

[328] Child, "A Backward Glance," 13.

> One would have taken the pipe-smoking Walter Piston to be a businessman or perhaps a lawyer. He was someone who seemed to be completely self-composed, without any of the flightiness or unpredictability we expect from an artist. […] As a teacher he was soft-spoken and placid, and in the sessions one on one with him I had to pry the words out to get him to talk. It was well worth it since he always spoke good sense.[329]

Berger's retrospective assessment of Piston's music was equally positive. In a late interview, he stated: "[Piston] was a fine craftsman and I still admire his music. I think he's underestimated."[330] The statement is consistent with the view of Piston's compositions Berger held since his Harvard days. His two early articles on Piston, the first published in 1935 in *Trend* and the second appearing in 1943 in *Listen,* express similar sentiments, as they both advocate for a greater recognition of Piston's works.

A known perfectionist, Piston was not a prolific composer. Berger identified this trait as a factor that contributed to his lack of recognition:

> [Piston] did not grow 'en pleine vue' of his musical public, but sprang up a fully developed composer. He has been calculating and critical to an unusual degree, and has preferred to eliminate his inferior works himself rather than oblige the public to do so for him. He has likewise spared his listeners the pains of his formative and propaedeutical attempts.[331]

Berger's early advocacy for Piston went beyond his writings. In 1933 he featured his composition on a radio program that he hosted, and arranged for a performance of the same piece in concert at the Pennsylvania resort known as the Unity House.[332] Berger had initially intended to dedicate the entire radio show to

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[329] *Reflections,* 227.

[330] Child, "A Backward Glance," 13.

[331] Arthur V. Berger, "Walter Piston," *Trend* (January–February 1935): 210.

[332] The Unity House was a resort located in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. At the time of the performance in 1933, the resort was run by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The resort attracted guests from New York City and Philadelphia, and in addition to recreational activities featured "dramatic performances, concerts, and lectures on current events, economics, art and

Piston's works, but this proved impossible, as Piston responded to the request with: "It is kind of you to think of giving the whole half-hour for a broadcast of my music. Unfortunately I have as yet no small piano pieces to fill it with and three works are tied up in the process of publication."[333] Ultimately, Piston's *Flute and Piano Sonata* was selected to be aired on the radio and performed at the Unity House.[334]

In his criticism, Berger judged the quality of Piston's work at the same level as that of the better-known Harris and Copland, placing them all "in the front ranks of American composers."[335] His 1936 *Trend* article on Piston makes his position unequivocal from the opening paragraph, which states:

> The tendency of American composers to eschew idiosyncratic formulae and to return to more absolute values makes it incredibly difficult for chroniclers to write about them. […] Why, then, write of [Piston]? The question is pertinent and I am prepared to answer: because I think the measure of his fame—relative, to be sure, to that of other moderns—is scarcely proportionate to the degree of his significance. And if I shall have called the attention of a few votaries of modern music, in this paper, to the existence of Piston's creative output, and shall have prevailed upon them to seek out his work, I shall have, if I may venture to say so, done nobly.[336]

With respect to the national style, Berger argued in his 1943 article in *Listen* that unlike Harris or Copland, whose music contained transparent Americanisms, in

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literature, and social psychology presented by college professors, union leaders, and public figures." For more information see "Unity House Historical Marker," ExplorePAhistory.com, accessed 29 November 2019, <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-366> and Lawrence Squeri, *Better in the Poconos: The Story of Pennsylvania's Vacationland* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 128-9.

[333] Letter from Walter Piston to Arthur Berger, 14 June 1933, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[334] Letter from Walter Piston to Arthur Berger, 28 July [1933], Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[335] Berger, "Walter Piston," 210. He continued building on the idea in his 1943 article in *Listen*, which focuses exclusively on these three composers.

[336] Ibid.

Piston's case it was "much more difficult to find evidences of a specifically American expression in his music."[337] He hypothesized that "a reflection of Piston's national origin may possibly be sought in his peculiar brand of humor, which is neither ponderous in the modern German manner not self-conscious and 'smart-aleck' after the fashion of recent French music."[338] Berger found Piston's ballet *The Incredible Flautist* of 1938 to best exemplify the "delightful satire" of his early works.

Overall, Berger identified Piston as a representative of what he called the "international" style. He did not use the term in a pejorative sense, however; nor did he see it as reflecting negatively on Piston's music:

> Although there is a certain aura of disapproval and doubt surrounding even the most favorable references to this style, it seems to me a completely natural phenomenon in view of the cultural and social evolution of our time. Moreover, in terms of the special character of American civilization, it seems appropriate that it should find its most vigorous partisanship in our country.[339]

As some of the characteristics of Piston's international style, Berger identified "extra-ordinary suavity, brilliant command of form, and mastery of the long line."[340] These were sentiments he would repeat in subsequent writings. For instance, in a 1947 article he described the Third Quartet as containing the "familiar urbanity and affability, and the unadventurous continuation of Romantic tradition, strikingly fused with a wholly contemporary, classical economy, and the accompanying sense of

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[337] Berger, "American Composers: Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Walter Piston," 8.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Ibid.

fitness and of the exact point of surfeit."[341] He returned to the concept of the long line in a 1951 review of the Violin Sonata, in which he commented: "One of the things that gives [his] music its unique character is the way he insists on the long line at a time when others are exploiting the constantly interrupted phrase."[342]

During his reviewing career, Berger discussed Piston's works in other publications, although none were as focused or detailed as the *Trend* and *Listen* articles. In all these writings, Berger consistently refrained from framing Piston within the concept of an American compositional style.[343] Notably, for his brief appearance on the pages of *Reflections*, Piston is placed in a different context than that proposed in Berger's earlier writings. Instead of being linked with Copland and Harris, he is now connected with Carter and Sessions:

> [Sessions and Carter] were respected for a certain degree of weightiness and seriousness in music without any fashionable local color. It is a revelation to have attention drawn to the rhythmic intricacies that establish the American parentage of these two predominantly abstract masters. I think Walter Piston might be added to their number to make it a triumvirate.[344]

In retrospect, thus, Berger distanced Piston from the "Americanists" Copland and Harris, and grouped him with Carter and Sessions, two staunch internationalists.

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[341] Arthur Berger, "Harvard Opens Symposium on Music Criticism," *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 May 1947.

[342] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 27 October 1951, 60.

[343] Despite not writing music full of clichéd Americanisms, Piston at the onset of WWII became aware of the importance of his role as an American composer. In a letter written to Berger on 2 August 1943 he wrote: "I had a slump for the first year of the war, feeling that writing music was about the most futile occupation. What got me out of it chiefly was getting letters from men in the armed forces who said they hoped I was keeping composing because that was one of the things they were out there for. I have completely recovered a sense that it is important and that I am meant to do that job." See letter from Walter Piston to Arthur Berger, 2 August 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[344] *Reflections*, 25.

Piston's own remarks, made in a 1962 interview with Wilfrid Mellers on National Educational Television (precursor to PBS), and which Berger may therefore have heard, corroborate this placement firmly:

> Well, I suppose one has to first of all admit the desirability to develop a nationalistic music. Suppose for the sake of argument that we do. America is a big country and we are made of a composite nationality. And when you conclude that we have no background, I would say our backgrounds are the same as yours. I'm sure you would include in your background Italian music of the Renaissance, French music, German music; you should give us the right to include those in our backgrounds, because they are our artistic antecedents, and not only that, but our blood. I myself am one-fourth Italian. Another thing is that America is many different kinds. […]As far as my own feeling goes, I would say that music of any nationality is very simply stated as being music written by composers who are of that nationality.[345]

Roger Sessions

As we have seen, Piston wore the "international" label well. In harmony with him, and in contrast to Harris, Copland, and later Foss, Roger Sessions was steadfast throughout his career in his belief that any attempt to create a nationalistic music created a product that was inherently flawed. He expresses this in a letter published in *Modern Music* in 1940:

[345] Mark DeVoto, Wilfrid Mellers, Walter Piston, "Two Composers on American Music at Mid-Century: Walter Piston in Conversation with Wilfrid Mellers, 1962," *American Music* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 121.

> A consciously "national style," in any field, inevitably becomes a picturesque mannerism, a kind of trademark, devoid of significant human content, irremediably outmoded the moment its novelty is gone. […] I do not believe that advocates of "American Music" would be seriously content with a picturesque folklore or with the musical reproduction, either specific or general, of American scenes or landscapes—we are quite adequately supplied with these in our popular music and various other manifestations. A nation is far greater than that. […] It gains much of each character, no doubt from the conditions of time and space under which those efforts are made. But it is the efforts and the goals which are really essential. So how can we demand, in advance, qualities which can reveal themselves only gradually, in works, the products of clear artistic vision? It is such works which, if and when they come into existence, will reveal America to us, not as the mirror of things already discovered, but as a constantly renewed and fresh experience of the realities that music alone can reveal.[346]

Sessions stood by this belief, and in an interview with musicologist Andrea Olmstead, conducted in 1975, he reflected: "Anything I did and put my whole self into must have something American about it. I don't believe in being self-conscious about these things, then the music becomes essentially contrived."[347] Berger was familiar with Sessions's view, and in *Reflections* described him as "openly hostile" to the idea of the deliberate creation of an American style.[348]

In an essay entitled "Reminiscence: Roger Sessions," published in *Perspectives of New Music* in 1985, Berger recalled his first encounter with Sessions's music. Upon hearing the incidental music from the *Black Maskers* at a

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[346] Roger Sessions, "On the American Future," *Modern Music* 17, no. 2 (January–February 1940): 71–75. Reprinted in part in Sam Morgenstern (ed.), *Composers on Music: From Palestrina to Copland* (New York: Bonanza, 1956), 500–503.

[347] Andrea Olmstead, "Roger Sessions: A Personal Portrait," *Tempo* 127 (December 1978): 10.

[348] *Reflections*, 25.

1931 Copland-Sessions concert, he decided that "Sessions was someone I wanted to meet and get to know."[349] It was not until a decade later that they became acquainted.

One of Berger's earliest known writings on Sessions's music appeared in 1935, following the Boston premiere of the *Black Maskers Orchestral Suite*. In his analysis, he not only discussed the piece, but also noted the stylistic changes Sessions's music had undergone in the decade since the work had been composed:

> [*Black Maskers*] exhibited a manner quite opposed to the one in which the composer has later found himself at home. Yet it must be confessed he showed himself in the formative work entirely in command of his resources. The newer Sessions seeks clarity of form and transparency and disavows the restlessness and inordinate dissonance of post-war expressionism; the Sessions who wrote […] *Black Maskers* back in 1923, on the contrary, responded with little reservation to these post-war tendencies and followed the example of those who, as yet unapprised of Stravinsky's so-called "neo-classic" enunciation, persisted in arousing and startling, and in exploiting novelty of sound and effect.[350]

Berger returned to Sessions in a 1950 column that appeared in the *Saturday Review* under a whimsical title, "Enduring Sessions." Berger felt Sessions suffered from the reputation of being an "intellectual composer," a notably problematic label. He commented: "Intellectuality there is, to be sure, in the superb craftsmanship, but this is scarcely a vice."[351] Nevertheless, Berger admitted that the technical complexity of Sessions's music might serve as a possible deterrent not only for the performer, but also the listener. He explained:

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[349] Arthur Berger, "Roger Sessions: A Reminiscence," *Perspectives of New Music* 23, no. 2 (Spring–Summer, 1985): 117.

[350] Arthur Berger, "Sessions for Rare Local Performance," [*Boston Evening Transcript*], 18 February 1935, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[351] Berger, "Enduring Sessions," 53.

> From the listener's point of view […] only the most astute can recognize, on the initial hearings, the much higher discipline and control preventing so many independent elements, out of line though they may be, from falling into chaos. But it remains a question whether all these intricacies have merely to take time before a wider public will react to them as readily as it now reacts to the one-time perplexing last quartets of Beethoven.[352]

Berger's tone throughout the article is cautious, but cautiously optimistic. He praised the New York Critics Circle and the Naumburg Foundation for bestowing awards upon Sessions's Symphony No. 2, writing: "The experts for once, instead of playing drum major to the band wagon, have reflected honor upon themselves by giving a much needed fillip to very worthy music that on its own would have a hard battle to fight."[353] He also lauded Dimitiri Mitropoulous, a "courageous figure in power," who programmed the work, keeping it from being "immediately put on the shelf" after its premiere. Finally, he noted with satisfaction the release of Symphony No. 2 on Columbia Records, which allowed the public long-term access to a composition that "has more than enough in it for us to live with it happily for a long time."[354]

In 1952 Berger had occasion to review Sessions's newly composed second quartet. While he found fault with the work, calling it at times, "problematic," his overall opinion of Sessions did not waver:

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[352] Berger, "Enduring Sessions," 53.

[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid., 58.

> This composer occupies a singular position as America's most respected musical intellect and one of its soundest and most sincere creative figures and anything from his pen merits more than ordinary consideration. It has, too, happened more than once before that the virtues of his music have taken time to make themselves apparent, for he is far from the school of the easy, direct appeal.[355]

In his 1985 recollections of Sessions, Berger emphasized that composer's drive to be independent, stating: "He could be formidable in announcing his aversions, but he stood alone and, as far as I know, he was not a joiner."[356] Berger linked this trait of Sessions the man to the stubborn lack of overt Americanisms in the music of Sessions the composer. Yet, as with Piston, Berger did not think this lessened his importance as an influential American. Nor did it diminish the quality of Sessions's music, the neglect of which both during and after his lifetime Berger found lamentable.

The Role of Conductors

As evident from his critical writings discussed above, Berger was of course well aware of the difficult path new works of modern American composers had to traverse to reach their listeners via performances and recordings. Achieving performance proved a struggle especially in the world of orchestral music, where, barring an unusually meddlesome board of directors, programming was left to the discretion of a conductor. For Berger, therefore, a conductor held pivotal responsibility for the present and future of modern American music.

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[355] Arthur Berger, "New Quartet," [*New York Herald Tribune]*, 26 June 1956.

[356] Berger, "Roger Sessions: A Reminiscence," 117.

Berger frequently discoursed on the impact of conductors on composers of American music. While some of these discussions concerned the figure of the conductor generally, he paid particular attention to four of his contemporary conductors: Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951), Dmitri Mitropoulos (1896–1960), Pierre Boulez (1925–2016), and Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990). The section below explores Berger's thoughts on the impact that these four had on the development of American modern music.

Serge Koussevitzky

While throughout Koussevitzky's career Berger acknowledged the importance of his support of American composers, it was only later that he recognized the sheer magnitude of the conductor's impact on the trajectory of American music. In a 1975 interview, he stated:

> For my own part, I should say that I appreciate Koussevitzky more now than I did during his lifetime, and I should like it to be kept in mind, as a qualification to all of my remarks, that on balance I retain a very favorable impression with regard to his total contribution. […] As a musician with my own criteria it was natural for me to take exception to some of Koussevitzky's musical decisions. I now become more and more aware that he was a big man, and there is no one of his stature and influence who is currently dedicated as he was to the cause, to the sheer crisis of survival, of the American composer.[357]

[357] Interview with Arthur Berger, "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," *Boston Arts Review*, January 1975, 16. In *Reflections*, Berger edited the later part of the statement to read: "As a composer I *now am convinced* that he was a big man, and it is difficult to find anyone of his stature and influence who is currently dedicated as he was to the cause, to the sheer crisis of survival, of the American composer" (emphasis mine); see *Reflections*, 209.

Indeed, Berger had long felt this way, having written in a 1954 column in the *Saturday Review* that Copland's "present eminence may be traced back to Koussevitzky more than to any other single benefactor."[358]

Specifically, Berger emphasized that Koussevitzky both brought creative talent to Boston and worked closely with the composers located in the area, making it a "tremendously exciting place."[359] He also cited Koussevitzky's formidable "presence" as an asset in accomplishing his goals:

> [His] charisma helped Koussevitzky do many of the things he got done. If it's something that can be cultivated, I would not put it past him to have deliberately cultivated it. […] I refer to the way he so obviously *seemed* to have contrived his public image and to make a special point to maintaining his autocratic stance. […] Charisma, needless to say, is a useful weapon when it comes to making demands.[360]

Berger recalled how Koussevitzky's often barely contained enthusiasm and excitement for a new piece he championed would spread to those around him, often having a significant positive impact on the reception of a modern composer's work. It was not uncommon for him to declare a composition, in his inimitable accent, "dee grea-eatest."[361] In a 1978 interview, Berger summarized Koussevitzky's strategy:

> Koussevitzky performed a considerable service on behalf of music of quite a different leaning—preparing the public to receive it hospitably, preparing his audiences to accept its particular character, getting people enthusiastic over it by conveying his own enthusiasm, and playing works again if they were not well received the first time.[362]

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[358] Arthur Berger, "Koussevitzky Revalued," *Saturday Review*, 25 September 1954, 68.

[359] Interview with Arthur Berger, "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," *Boston Arts Review,* January 1975, 16.

[360] Ibid.

[361] Ibid.

[362] Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 50.

Despite his general approval of the conductor's approach, Berger was pointed in his criticism of Koussevitzky's open distaste for and avoidance of the music of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, as well as those later composers who followed their stylistic trajectories.[363] While accepting that a conductor should be fulfilled in his work, and thus should not be required to "perform music that is unsympathetic to his temperament," the critic still declared Viennese atonality and serialism Koussevitzky's "blind spot." Overall, Berger acknowledged that the "myth" of Koussevitzky as the heroic conductor who saved American music was inaccurate and exaggerated. Yet he still argued that:

> When all of the pros and cons are tallied, it may very well turn out that he did more than anyone before or since to counteract the deplorable musical inferiority that causes us to bow and scrape before the most mediocre foreign talents—creative or otherwise—while our own musicians struggle to survive in limbo.[364]

As we have seen, then, Berger respected Koussevitzky highly for his advocacy of American music and composers, yet he perceived him realistically and did not judge him immune from criticism. For example, despite being well aware of Koussevitzky's "intolerance for criticism," and how this may impact his own career, Berger was often harsh in evaluating the conductor's performing style and technical shortcomings. As he recalls, "this was true not only when I was in close proximity, serving a stint in my youth on the wonderful old *Boston Transcript*, but later when I

[363] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 18.

[364] Ibid.

was [a] critic in New York on the *Sun* and the *Herald Tribune.*"[365] Specifically, Berger felt Koussevitzky too often conducted with a heavy and lugubrious hand, and "handled the orchestra as if it were a huge ponderous instrument."[366] He commented:

> Around 1930 American music had, contrariwise, given promise of a certain sparseness under the influence of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and the "Six." Having provided a vehicle for the virtuosity of Koussevitzky's Bostonians and an atmosphere for the maestro to project, a composer was likely to have qualms as to what the free reading would do to his conception. Apropos of one such interpretation, the creator remarked that the atmosphere was "so thick that you could cut it."[367]

Yet, Berger felt that even when Koussevitzky's manner distorted a composer's intentions, his interpretation was filled with such conviction and feeling that "the music came across beautifully."[368] He noted that, "if at times he laid the atmosphere on too thickly, at other times it was precisely the way in which he projected an atmosphere that enabled him to put over a new American work."[369] For example, in a 1946 review in *Modern Music* of an RCA release of Koussevitzky's rendition of *Appalachian Spring*, he argued that the conductor's tempos are "often too slow and occasionally too fast," and that at times "his note values are twice as long as Copland intended."[370] Yet, in 1954 he praised RCA for reissuing the same recording, stating that it was "imperative" that they do so: "If we were not always sufficiently

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[365] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 16.

[366] Berger, "Koussevitzky Revalued," 68.

[367] Ibid., 69.

[368] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 16.

[369] Arthur Berger, "A Debt to Hanson-and Koussevitzky," *Saturday Review*, 30 January 1954, 56.

[370] Arthur Berger, "Scores and Records," *Modern Music* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1946): 213.

thankful to Koussevitzky during his life for his service to American music, [his] recordings of *Appalachian Spring* would be enough to render us aware of our debt."[371]

Ultimately, Berger felt that Koussevitzky's charisma, in conjunction with his demanding personality, helped to conceal some of the technical weaknesses in his conducting. Regardless of his shortcomings, Berger noted that, "when his intellectual appreciation of a work equaled his instinct for fine performance, the outcome could be truly extraordinary."[372]

In 1975, with Koussevitzky dead for over twenty years, Berger retrospectively mourned the loss of the energy and excitement for modern music that he felt the conductor had brought to Boston. He stated: "Boston is much poorer today, since the symphony has almost totally abdicated this responsibility. The argument that audiences are not interested […] would not go down with Koussevitzky. He would have found ways to make them interested."[373] Berger also acknowledged the role of the financial patronage of the Koussevitzky family in the creation and dissemination of American music. His appreciation came from personal experience: Berger served on the jury of the American International Music Fund, founded before Koussevitzky's death and continued under Olga Koussevitzky's leadership.[374] He was also a

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[371] Berger, "A Debt to Hanson-and Koussevitzky," 56.

[372] Berger, "Koussevitzky Revalued," 69.

[373] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 16.

[374] Letter to Arthur Berger from Olga Koussevitzky on behalf of the American International Music Fund, Inc., 23 October 1964, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL and Press Release from The Library of Congress, "Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in Library of Congress Awards Grants to Twelve Composers of New Music," Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The American International Music Fund and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation are different entities. Both were founded by Koussevitzky. At

composer recipient of a Koussevitzky Music Foundation commission for his Septet.[375]

Dimitri Mitropoulos

With all of the attention that Koussevitzky received during his lifetime, and especially the legend that developed after his death, Berger felt that in comparison, Dimitri Mitropoulos's contribution to American music was severely undervalued. Although Mitropoulos did not become the principal conductor of the New York Philharmonic until 1950, he appeared as a guest conductor as early as 1936.[376] Berger described his impression of Mitropoulos at his debut to the readers of the *New York Herald Tribune* thus:

> The Greek conductor […] is an exceedingly wiry and vivacious figure on the podium. […] There is something athletic in his manner although he is slight in build. When he desires a vigorous response from his men, he is himself as vigorous as a prize-fighter. At a sustained fortissimo […] he held his fists posed like a boxer who awaits his chance to spring. Hands, arms, and shoulders […] go into action with remarkable flexibility, suggesting supple wings. […] Both arms are in use almost at all times.[377]

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the time Berger was on the board, the American International Music Fund appears to have been more focused on providing funding for recordings of new works. The Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, commonly known as the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, awarded commissions. See "About the Foundation," *Koussevitzky Music Foundation*, <https://www.koussevitzky.org/about.html>, accessed 11 January 2020, and Interview with Olga Koussevitzky, 20 November 1969, which can be streamed at "Madame Olga Koussevitzky and the Koussevitzky International Recording Award," *NYPR Archives Collection*, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/madame-olga-koussevitzky-and-the-koussevitzky-international-recording-award/>, accessed 11 January 2020.

[375] "Press Release from The Library of Congress: Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in Library of Congress Awards Grants to Twelve Composers of New Music," Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[376] For more information see William R. Trotter, *The Priest of Music: The Life of Dimitri Mitropoulos* (Portland, Oregon, Amadeus Press, 1995), and *Reflections*, 218.

[377] A[rthur]. V. B[erger]., "Introducing a Guest Conductor," *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 January 1936.

In *Reflections*, Berger noted that just as Koussevitzky had assimilated himself into Boston's culture, Mitropoulos likewise became entrenched in the musical community of New York City.[378] Unlike Koussevitzky, however, he displayed a penchant for the music of the Second Viennese school in his programming, which Berger found "all the nobler since their music has less audience appeal."[379] Unfortunately, Berger suggested that Mitropoulos lacked Koussevitzky's personal charisma. He described him as "monklike, almost shy, retiring,"[380] and speculated that his repertoire choices may have led to his dismissal from the New York Philharmonic, as "he did not have the PR skills for dramatizing the adventurous components of his programs."[381] In comparing the two conductors' approaches to programming modern works, Berger stated:

> A conductor like Mitropoulos loved the music he did, and did it not because he had to do the token modern work that goes now on a program. It was there because he really loved the music even though it was not the best thing for his career. Koussevitzky, on the other hand, was able to fight the opposition, and made a big thing out of his performances of new music, especially when he himself publicized it.[382]

Berger's respect for Mitropoulos stemmed partially from personal experience. After hearing a performance of Berger's *Quartet for Woodwinds*, the conductor

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[378] *Reflections*, 46.

[379] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 18.

[380] *Reflections*, 218.

[381] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 17.

[382] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

approached him at intermission to offer him a commission for a new work.[383] Berger recalled the exchange as follows:

> Now, it was well-known that Mitropoulos' leanings were in the direction of the atonal and serial composers who were in, or stemmed from, the twentieth-century Viennese tradition. So my immediate response was, "You can't possibly mean it. This piece is in C major." But he assured me he recognized quality and craftsmanship regardless of the idiomatic terms in which they were couched. I still could not take this informal, impromptu offer seriously, having been inured to so many empty promises from conductors and virtuosos who were prompted by the excitement of the moment and the social occasion. But he kept his word. I understand he took the money for such commissions out of his own salary.[384]

Berger also wrote admiringly about the manner in which Mitropoulos prepared a composition for performance, stating: "He never gave us that sense of the conductor as supreme musical dictator, leaning down from his lofty perch to bestow a favor."[385] After commissioning a piece, the conductor stood as a willing collaborator throughout the compositional process, yet his input was not autocratic, as he sought to understand the underlying processes of the work.[386] Berger recalled: "It was just remarkable to work with him, and he was interested in the score when I was doing it,

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[383] Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 62. The resulting piece was *Ideas of Order*, and Berger was paid one thousand dollars and the cost of copying.

[384] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 17. Berger told the story often; see also Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 62, Draft of OHAM interview, and *Reflections*, 212. In *Reflections*, Berger recalls an additional detail of Milton Babbitt being present during the conversation, and Mitropoulos announcing that Babbitt would be his witness.

[385] See Coppock and Berger, "A Conversation with Arthur Berger," 62.

[386] Letters between Berger and Mitropoulos are located in the Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL, with other materials pertaining to *Ideas of Order*. Their content ranges from administrative details, such as possible performance dates, to more technical details regarding the music.

and I showed him things."[387] For example, while preparing for the premiere of *Ideas of Order*, Mitropoulos evidently questioned Berger about a certain passage:

> Mitropoulos said he would try it his way at the rehearsal and I could judge whether or not it would be better. He did not do this at all, and after the rehearsal I asked him why he had not done so. He said that in terms of his own indoctrination this type of music was new to him, and with the help of my explanation he had been able to apprehend its nature better.[388]

Berger stated that in his experience, this behavior was not an anomaly; rather, on numerous occasions he witnessed Mitropoulos working extensively, thoughtfully, and deferentially with a composer. This attitude particularly impressed Berger, and he compared it favorably with Koussevitzky's. The latter also sometimes got involved with a composer of a piece he was to perform, but with a greatly different outcome: as we have seen, Koussevitzky was more likely to be controlling. He also took liberties with scores, sometimes intentionally, and at other times because of a lack of technical prowess, while Mitropoulos was known for his attention to detail and precision, even making a point to memorize his scores.[389]

Although Berger is briefly quoted doing so above, it is difficult to directly contrast Koussevitzky with Mitropoulos. They worked at different times, in different cities, had different personas both public and private, and promoted different types of contemporary music. Berger praised and admired both conductors, highlighting their strengths while critiquing what he saw as their shortcomings, and consistently lauded

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[387] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[388] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 17.

[389] When asked why he memorized scores, Mitropoulos evidently confided to Berger that "it was just some extra trick […] to give the audience an additional show of virtuosity in order to raise its confidence, and enhance its image of the conductor as trapeze artist." See *Reflections*, 218.

them for their support of modern American music. He was not as complimentary, however, about Boulez and Bernstein, whose presence as conductors of major symphony orchestras also had a substantial impact on the American musical scene.

Pierre Boulez

Berger had a decidedly negative opinion of Pierre Boulez's influence as a conductor of modern, especially American music, and he was vocal in his disapproval. His criticism centered not on Boulez's conducting, but on his programming choices, which he saw as too focused on the standard twentieth-century repertory. Berger argued that Boulez's belief that "symphony audiences should absorb the traditional twentieth-century tendencies before being exposed to the newest music" resulted in a lack of attention to the music of "here and now" in his programming. In a 1975 interview, he stated:

> Boulez is a musician of top rank, and he is intelligent and enlightened, so that the least we should expect from him is a recognition that there is a large accumulation of twentieth-century masterpieces which are by now qualified to be included as a matter of course in the standard concert repertory.[390]

Most problematic to Berger was Boulez's neglect and outspoken criticism of American music and culture. He recalled such an instance:

[390] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 17.

> I found a certain condescension on his part when he brought us Berg's *Three Orchestral Pieces* (1914) with commentary on an N[ational] E[ducational] T[elevision] program in the spirit of one bringing culture to the natives. […] I cannot believe that Boulez knows what is being written in this country well enough to make such a condemnation. […] Boulez would certainly be surprised to hear me say so, but in writing off current American music in one indiscriminate bolus he is not very different from Harold C. Schoenberg of the *Times*, who writes off the whole of twentieth-century music, including the remarkable creative contributions that Boulez himself has made.[391]

Berger identified Boulez's presence on the scene as a symptom of what he saw as a problematic Europeanization of the American orchestra conductor. Steadfastly critical of the trend throughout his career, in a 2003 interview he stated:

> This is one area where things have definitely not improved. They're pretty much the same as they were in my day. I don't see why Carnegie Hall has to turn to Europeans like Boulez to occupy a distinguished role on its roster, and why the management and boards of our major symphonies spend so much effort shopping abroad when a new conductor is needed despite the fact that America has produced such fine conductors from Levine, Bernstein, and Thomas onwards.[392]

Leonard Bernstein

As evident from his pointed remarks on Boulez, Berger was weary of Europeans being hired as conductors of leading American orchestras (Koussevitzky and Mitropoulos being marked exceptions). He felt that if American music were to flourish in the United States, it could only do so under the baton of an American. Among the up and coming American conductors of his time, Berger felt that the young Leonard Bernstein held the utmost promise. Yet, filed away in Berger's papers

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[391] "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 18. Berger noted that Boulez did program some American chamber works in a series called "Perspective Encounters," better known as the "Rug Concerts." Berger felt he programmed these works mainly because the composers would tend to be present for discussion, and the concerts were often covered in the media. See *Reflections*, 214.

[392] Daniel Felsenfeld, "In Conversation with Arthur Berger," *New Music Box*, 31 January 2003, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/In-Conversation-with-Arthur-Berger/>, accessed 12 January 2020.

housed in the New York Public Library is a caricature of a middle-aged Bernstein, accompanied by three lines of text:

> It was the career that could have transformed American music. What in our culture and in himself led our most gifted musician to squander it? But Bernstein's only sixty-five—and conductors live a long time.[393]

This quote from Leon Botstein's 1983 article "The Tragedy of Leonard Bernstein," is an accurate summation of Berger's own assessment of the conductor's career.[394] In *Reflections*, he argued passionately that Bernstein had delivered the harshest betrayal, the most disastrous blow to American music.[395] Berger felt that with his power and charisma and his close connections to prominent composers and performers, the conductor had the potential to be a champion of American music. Yet, Bernstein, "for whom contemporary American music was like the proverbial mother's milk, […] preferred to display his conducting prowess in the symphonies of Gustav Mahler."[396]

Berger fumed that even though Bernstein had sometimes performed modern music, he tended to avoid serial and atonal works, and as a result, left much new American music untouched:

> Like Boulez he exonerated himself from the obligation of playing a good deal of American music by announcing mid-career his ideological objections to the atonal and serial approaches, which accounted for much of the best music being written in this country.[397]

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[393] Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[394] Leon Botstein, "The Tragedy of Leonard Bernstein," *Harper's Magazine*, May 1983, 38.

[395] *Reflections*, 214.

[396] Ibid., 45.

[397] Ibid., 215.

Beyond the impact of that view on the fortunes of American music, Berger also argued that Bernstein did a great disservice to atonal and serial music overall, when he suggested in his Norton Lectures that atonality as a concept was inherently and irredeemably problematic.[398]

Berger's analysis of Bernstein's conducting career appears to be colored by both jealousy and disillusionment. There are signs of his resentment of Bernstein's meteoric rise, natural charisma, and self-assuredness. For instance, he described the young Bernstein as "a rapidly rising protégé of [Koussevitzky], [who] already visualized himself as future Messiah of American conductors."[399] Berger had been hopeful that Bernstein would arise as a savior of American music, and was bitterly disappointed when the conductor did not take up this role. He felt that Bernstein had betrayed an entire generation of American composers, including himself and some of his closest friends and colleagues, and he had never forgiven him.

The Hidden Costs of Modern Music

The obstacles that American composers faced in getting their works performed were numerous, and not limited to conductors' programming choices. In his 1958 article "Music for Nothing: The Cost of Composing," published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Berger systematically outlined the challenges American composers faced.

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[398] See *Reflections*, 215 and Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[399] *Reflections*, 211. Berger describes Bernstein similarly in the Koussevitzky interview, referring to him as Koussevitzky's protégé who "had a meteoric rise as both conductor and composer." See "Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation," 16.

In the article, Berger referenced a study by the National Music Council that reported that only seven to eight per cent of works played by major American orchestras were composed by American-born composers, either living or dead.[400] Among the reasons for these sobering statistics, he argued, was that programming decisions were often heavily influenced by powerful boards of directors. Therefore, even having the backing of a conductor was not always sufficient, as the board often had the authority to override him. Berger asserted that many boards operated under the belief that the audience would pay for the classics, but not new music; thus, new music was not prioritized.

Yet, Berger opined, the issue went beyond the lack of programming, and highlighted the disparity between the box office proceeds and the percentage of the composer's final payout:

> An American composer carries from a performance of his music by a major symphony orchestra the exhilarating memory of his conception brought to life. Yet he also, with surprisingly few exceptions, retains a formidable souvenir of financial debt or deficit. […] Laymen often find this hard to believe, because of the publicity or glamour that may surround the event, even when audiences are apathetic or resistant. [401]

Among the expenses incurred throughout the compositional process, Berger identified the cost of copying parts, reproducing manuscripts, and postal and travel expenses.[402] He also noted that publishers and recording companies charged performers royalties, and groups such as the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Performers

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[400] Arthur Berger, "Music for Nothing: The Cost of Composing," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1958, 68.

[401] Ibid., 67–68.

[402] Berger discusses the role and the importance of having a good copier in Arthur Berger, "Copyist is Composer's Best Friend," [*New York Herald Tribune*], 5 June 1953.

(ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Incorporated (BMI), and the American Composers Alliance (ACA) also charged a commission for their services. While some of these expenses could be seen as one-time "start-up" costs, Berger noted the rarity of getting a second performance of a new work, even when its premiere received positive reviews. Orchestras were more interested in world premieres than repeat performances, as only the former were seen as newsworthy events helpful in ensuring publicity.

Berger further argued that while commissions could alleviate the financial burdens levied on a composer, such opportunities were limited, and substantial monetary sums were only awarded to the most prestigious composers. Furthermore, he asserted that it was less likely for an American composer to receive a commission than his European counterpart. Therefore, most American composers could not be dependent on commissions as a means of financial support. Berger acknowledged that scholarships and awards available to young composers were helpful, both financially and in terms of gaining recognition, but he expressed frustration that these awards often had age limits. An older composer, he opined, was forced to realize that "with a half a dozen of these [awards] behind him, he may find very few goals indeed once he passes his thirtieth birthday, and he may never be heard of again."[403]

While Berger recognized the possibility of composers seeking out their own funding, he found this prospect unappealing, admitting that personally he preferred to deal with institutions, such as performing organizations and charitable foundations. He wrote: "Today's composer, having lost his knack of coping with patrons and

[403] Berger, "Music for Nothing: The Cost of Composing," 70.

despising the embarrassment or obsequiousness, much prefers such impersonal agencies."[404]

It appears that Berger's choice of *Atlantic Monthly* as a publication outlet for his article was a strategic one. The magazine's readership consisted mainly of the educated upper class, which tended to be the demographic of the audience members attending orchestral concerts. Many were also likely in a financial position that allowed them to donate generously to artistic endeavors. While Berger does not make a direct request for funding in the article, by highlighting the financial struggles of American composers, he is not so subtly appealing to the readers to reconsider the allocation of their philanthropic spending.

A New Hope?

While much of Berger's commentary on the state of contemporary music in America was negative or stemmed from a place of frustration, he felt that one area in which Americans superseded their European counterparts was that American "educational institutions [were] alive to contemporary findings in the arts."[405] In a newspaper column titled "Music: New Idioms: A Visitor's Startling Discovering Here," Berger describes visiting Italian composer Luigi Dallapiccola's surprise at the high level of

[404] Arthur Berger, "Commissions—New Way," *New York Times*, 18 April 1954. In this article Berger discussed a new form of commissioning that was instituted by the Creative Concerts Guild of Boston. This program focused on paying composer commissions using money from ticket revenue, just as was done with the performers, the hall rental, and the program printer. He admitted that in the three years since this approach had been implemented, the Guild had been running at a deficit and had to appeal to donors to make up for lost revenue. Nonetheless, Berger was encouraged by the new approach, especially since it guaranteed composer payment. This form of commissioning was not discussed in Berger's later article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, however; we can thus speculate that it did not prove a viable solution.

[405] Arthur Berger, "Music: New Idioms," [New York Herald Tribune], 19 August 1950.

student participation in contemporary music. Dallapiccola evidently expressed astonishment upon hearing that the Juilliard School had mounted the American premiere of his opera *The Prisoner*, declaring that "no comparable European institution […] would be likely to undertake a work in modern idiom of this proportion."[406] As Berger reports, after spending six weeks at the Berkshire Music Center, Dallapiccola had the "occasion to observe first-hand how our more enlightened schools operate," and he was impressed by the challenging contemporary music performed by the students. He "was even more delighted with the forums at which student compositions [were] performed, and the audience, including Friends of the Berkshire Music Center [were] invited by Aaron Copland to discuss the neophyte creative efforts."[407] Berger noted that the Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor at the time, Charles Munch, also expressed enthusiasm about these events, and similarly to Dallapiccola, declared that he was not aware of anything comparable taking place in schools abroad.

Berger felt that such forums, conducted at American universities and new music festivals such as the Berkshire, were an integral part of a young composer's development. He argued that in order to reach their full potential, it was imperative that students hear their works performed, and saw events that were open to the public and involved both professionals and students as particularly beneficial. Assessing one such event, held at Middlebury College in Vermont, he wrote:

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[406] Arthur Berger, "Music: New Idioms," [New York Herald Tribune], 19 August 1950.

[407] Ibid.

> Young, inexperienced composers [had the] most to gain from this and were naturally in the majority. The practiced composers were mostly on the faculty, but while they were the chief advisers, no rigorous lines were drawn between them and the rest. There was constant intermingling.[408]

Berger found that students in American universities were also fortunate in being often called upon to perform modern works. This was not always beneficial for the composer, as much of the music was difficult, and a student performance was often not equivalent to a professional one. That said, he pointed out that students often prepared more assiduously, especially if premiering a work or performing with the composer present. Indeed, a well-executed student performance might be preferable to an ill-prepared professional one, as performance organizations provided too little rehearsal time for modern works. Ultimately, Berger considered it ideal, for the sake of both student composers and performers, when at least some professionals joined the latter for modern music performances, the practice followed both at Middlebury College and Berkshire Music Center.[409]

Berger also argued that in order to gain recognition, performers should play new music instead of that from the common practice period. This, he asserted, would allow them to present a unique image, setting themselves apart from the rest. He wrote: "How much wiser [a performer] would be to give interesting, uncompromising programs that would gain him prestige?"[410] This approach of course would prove mutually beneficial for young composers and performers.

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[408] Arthur Berger, no title, article on the Composers Conference at Middlebury College, [*New York Herald Tribune*, n.d.].

[409] Ibid.

[410] Arthur Berger, "How Serious Musicians Survive," *Harvard Crimson*, January 1957, 68.

For the benefit of young composers, Berger outlined a number of solutions to the problem of making a living, based on his own experience, such as getting an advanced degree to pursue teaching and finding a job as a music critic. He advised that since the music community was so inept at dealing with contemporary works, "students would do well to be prepared. Electronic machines are capable of producing all the sounds of an orchestra. With access to these machines a composer would need no longer rely on performers to realize his total conception."[411]

Despite some positive opportunities available to the young American musician, Berger did not shy away from emphasizing to students the seriousness of the plight of the American composer and performer. He was firm in his admonishment to those seeking a career in music: "To anyone on the verge of pursuing music as a profession I should like to say that he be thoroughly sure of one thing: his love for music itself must be so great as to serve as its own compensation.[412] This opinion, expressed in 1957, did not change in his later years: asked to give advice to young composers in an interview conducted ca. 1996, he suggested that they "consider seriously some other line [of work]; I'd admonish them to think seriously about what they're getting into."[413] Berger pointed out that due to a "population explosion" in the field of composition, "no one in many lifetimes can come near hearing all or most of the music of young composers today to single out the most gifted. It has to be a

[411] Berger, "How Serious Musicians Survive," 68, 79. Despite this advice, Berger himself composed no electronic music.

[412] Ibid., 68.

[413] *Musically Incorrect*, 64–65.

lottery."[414] To those determined to succeed, he proposed that they should aim to receive an "all-round music education," become proficient at an instrument, preferably the piano, and learn to conduct.[415]

As demonstrated in the discussion above, Berger's writings on Americanism in music were some of his most voluminous, far-reaching, multi-faceted, and influential. He painted a vivid picture of the American musical landscape during the second half of the twentieth century, while highlighting challenges that faced a young country struggling to define its national identity in music. Yet arguably, as will be seen in the following chapter, Berger's most impactful writings with regard to American music were those dedicated to Aaron Copland, as they were to shape that composer's reception for decades to come.

[414] *Musically Incorrect*, 65.

[415] Arthur Berger, interviewed by Bruce Duffie, 28 March 1987 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/arthurberger.html>.

Chapter 5: Aaron Copland

Berger summed up his love and admiration for Copland in a eulogy that he delivered at the Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters on 6 December 1991, and the text of which was later published in *Perspectives of New Music*:

> In saying a last goodbye to Aaron Copland, I find it hard to single out the most memorable aspect of his life, work and career since there are so many remarkable things to remember. The warmth and gentleness of his personality, his readiness to listen to our problems and offer solutions—these are attributes that escaped no one who ever knew him. Their memory surrounds me like an aura as I stand here.[416]

Berger's writings on Copland were voluminous, profound, and directed toward a wide range of audiences. His Copland criticism can be found in scholarly journals such as *Musical Quarterly* and *Perspectives of New Music*; peppers the pages of the *Partisan Review* and the *Saturday Review*; and appears in numerous newspapers and magazines to which he contributed. In addition, personal correspondence survives between the two men, although their letters became less frequent with the passage of time.[417] Their exchanges included fevered debate, but also warm words of praise and encouragement. They give insight into Berger's evaluation of Copland as a composer and an individual, and play a prominent role in the discussion to follow.

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[416] Arthur Berger, "Copland 1900–1990," *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (1992): 296.

[417] According to Shirley, written correspondence between Berger and Copland was likely replaced in their later years with long-distance phone calls. He writes: "As years go on the correspondence becomes less frequent. This is partially the result of technological progress: long-distance telephoning became less of an extravagance and more of a regular way of communication." See Wayne D. Shirley, "Aaron Copland and Arthur Berger in Correspondence," *Aaron Copland and His World*, edited by Carol Oja and Judith Tick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 179. My own research indicates that at least for a time, the two means of communication overlapped: in a 1949 letter to Copland, Berger asks his friend to give him a "ring." See letter from Arthur Berger to Aaron Copland, 1949, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

Berger's views on Copland embody a level of complexity that is not as notable in his writings on his other contemporaries. He considered Copland a friend, a mentor, and a giant in the realm of composition. Yet, he also found his stylistic trajectory troublesome. Navigating these contradictions presented a challenge to Berger, and his efforts to reconcile them were not always successful, nor met with overwhelming approval. This chapter will address the history and reception of Berger's seminal biography of Copland. In addition, two major recurring themes in Berger's Copland writings will be explored: the tension between Copland's austere and populist styles[418] and the nature of Americanism in Copland's music. As we shall see, Berger's struggle to resolve these two issues to his satisfaction was informed by—and thus illuminates—his own conflicting aesthetic and political views.

Berger's Biography of Copland

After several years of work, numerous delays, and multiple rejections, Berger's biography of Copland was published by Oxford University Press in 1953.[419] The book, simply titled *Aaron Copland*, retailed for $3.50.

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[418] The specific terminology Berger used to articulate Copland's two "styles" changed, but the styles themselves were always well defined. Examples of synonyms for the "austere" style include severe, serious, and tough, while for "populist" these are simple, popular, accessible, workaday, and music for use. When not a part of a quote, I will use the terms austere vs. populist.

[419] The book was rejected by several other publishers, and Berger's original vision may have been broader than just a monograph on Copland. A rejection letter sent to Nathan Broder, an editor for G. Schirmer and a friend of Berger's who appears to have been working as his agent, from the publisher Alfred A. Knopf and dated 29 January 1952 states that in reference to a proposal of a series of six biographies, "we can express no interest in the series or in any individual volumes." It continues: "I must say that I quite admire much of Arthur Berger's book on Copland. I shall hope that you succeed in finding a publisher for it, as it is a book of which I should like to own a copy." A letter from Broder to Berger on G. Schirmer letterhead, dated 3 February 1953, notes that all the materials are being returned and the agreement of 3 March 1950 is cancelled. It states that multiple publishers have looked at the project, but are not interested in the series. By 16 March 1953, Berger received the much anticipated confirmation of a contract with Oxford University Press, whose letter reads: "I just realized that I had not confirmed that which I told you by phone some ten days or two weeks ago, namely, […]

A review in New York City's *Musical Courier* reads: "In this concise biography [Berger] presents a study of the leading American composer which will serve as a basic source-book on Copland."[420] The book would accomplish that and more. Not only was it the first published monograph on the composer, but for over three decades it remained the most comprehensive and frequently cited book-length study of Copland's music, until the publication of the latter's two-volume autobiography co-authored with Vivian Perlis.[421] It served as the cornerstone of Copland studies for almost fifty years, until the appearance of Howard Pollack's *Aaron Copland: The Life of an Uncommon Man* in 2000.[422]

Berger was conscious of the expanded readership that could be achieved by writing a book suitable for both serious musicians and general audiences. The resulting monograph was structured in two main parts: the first, directed to a general readership, was titled "The Man," and the second, targeted at a more specialized audience, "The Music."[423] To help his reader make sense of the book's structure, Berger advised:

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that we would be delighted to take on the Aaron Copland book and offer you a contract for the same." See letter from Herbert Weinstock (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.) to Nathan Broder, 29 January 1952; letter from Nate Broder to Arthur Berger, 3 February 1953; letter from Carroll G. Bowen to Arthur Berger, 16 March 1953; all in Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[420] [Unsigned] "Copland Seen by Arthur Berger," *Musical Courier*, 15 December 1953.

[421] Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), and Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[422] Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

[423] The monograph also includes an Appendix with Copland's work list, a discography, a list of books and articles by Copland, and a selected bibliography.

> The musically uninformed reader will have no trouble following Part One, since technical observations are reserved for later. But the reader interested in Copland mainly as a musician cannot afford to skim through these pages. For music is deeply involved in Copland's life—and not only his own music but musical activity in general.[424]

Part One is more biographical in nature and covers Copland's upbringing, education, travels, writings, and relationships to other scholars and musicians. Berger also references Copland's compositions in broad, non-theoretical terms, discussing their history and significance. Part Two, "The Music," focuses on Copland's stylistic development and includes remarks on his jazz influences, his use of folk music, his influence on Hollywood film scores, the Americanist elements in his works, and the dichotomy between his austere and populist styles. Berger approaches these issues through a study of multiple compositions, complete with musical examples; the works he judged to be pivotal, *Piano Variations* and the Third Symphony, are given a chapter each. Berger's intimate knowledge of Copland's output is evident in his analyses, and he does not shy away from the technical language.

As a friend and admirer of Copland, Berger was hardly in the position to write an unbiased biography, as he himself freely conceded. He opened the book's preface with the following statement:

[424] Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953): vi.

> It is generally considered a virtue in a book on a creative personality to balance favorable comment against unfavorable. This is thought to make for an honest report, while anything approaching eulogy is suspiciously viewed as the expression of a fanatic or as a form of paid publicity. It should therefore be said at once that the effort spent in analyzing Aaron Copland's scores so closely would seem hardly worthwhile were it not for a conviction of their very high quality. The still greater effort to put these analyses into words would be pointless were it not a matter of primary concern to acquaint others with music that has aroused in me such great feelings.[425]

Berger noted that the book does contain his criticism and reservations about certain aspects of Copland's music, albeit "not many." Overall, however, he admitted that the biography was written from the position of advocacy, stating: "Neither have I sought, in pursuit of what is generally regarded as a 'fair' evaluation, to disguise the basic assumption, since this was what made me want to write a book about Copland in the first place."[426]

It could be argued that, to the contrary, Berger either did not recognize, or chose not to admit how frequently he broadcast his reservations. Indeed, the contents of the book precariously balance praise and criticism, and more often than not lean toward the latter. To those familiar with Berger's other writings on Copland, it contains few surprises.

From the existing correspondence, there is a sense that Copland was not enthused with the prospect of Berger writing his biography, but neither did he discourage it. What is unclear is whether Copland's trepidation stemmed from his disapproval of Berger's treatment, a general dislike at being the subject of a

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[425] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* v.

[426] Ibid.

biography, an anxiety that the project would impinge on his own writing aspirations, or a combination of these.

It is equally unclear how much input Copland had on the final draft of the manuscript. In the preface, Berger writes: "Copland's patience in offering his co-operation whenever it was sought was, needless to say, of incalculable value in the execution of this project."[427] Their correspondence reveals that Copland provided photographs and manuscripts for the musical examples, but there is little indication that he contributed or commented on the text itself.[428] A copy of the page proofs held at the Library of Congress and marked as including Copland's edits contains nothing but a single date change in the appendix.[429]

Berger admitted that writing about Copland's music was a challenging and weighty task: "Copland has said he prefers to leave analysis of his music to others. As someone who has taken up the challenge, I can report that he managed to transmit his own uneasiness, so that I have often had the sense of violating some intimacy."[430] He also sensed, rightly or wrongly, that his subject was not entirely enamored with his analyses, recalling:

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[427] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* vi.

[428] See letters to Aaron [Copland] from Arthur [Berger] dated 28 June 1950, 5 August 1952, 23 June 1953, and the responses: letters to Arthur [Berger] from Aaron [Copland] dated, 1 July 1950 and August 1952; Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[429] Aaron Copland Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

[430] Arthur Berger, "Success Story," *The New York Review of Books,* 28 February 1985.

> When I was working on the book, I tried to get him to talk in specific musical terms, but he obviously did not relish doing so. […] Aaron made the observation that he was not comfortable with the analytic part of the [*Piano*] *Fantasy* article. I always had the feeling he felt that way about the technical side of my book.[431]

Reviews of the Book

Berger's book was widely publicized and reviewed in leading papers, journals, and magazines of the time. The majority of the reviews are positive, and they are consistent in their content. The author is lauded for his concise and technical approach to music analysis, knowledge of the subject matter, fairness in treatment of his subject, and overall success in creating a biography of a living composer.

Harold Clurman, who was a close personal friend of Copland, highlighted Berger's fight for the recognition of the composer's more austere works, and in the process provided the readers of the *Saturday Review* with a pithy summation of Berger's advocacy. Clurman writes:

> One of the chief merits of Arthur Berger's little monograph […] is its attempt to relate the more popular or readily acceptable of the composer's work to the more difficult work. "Since you get pleasure out of the effect of Copland's folk pieces […]," Mr. Berger appears to be saying, "won't you please take the trouble to realize the true meaning of these pieces by listening more patiently to those of Mr. Copland's pieces the pleasurable effect and value of which may at first elude you."[432]

As if in response to Clurman's charge, Lawrence Morton evidently did just that in preparation for his own review of Berger's book. He stated: "Especially important is the discussion of the *Piano Variations*, a work that, I confess, I must henceforth view

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[431] Copland and Perlis, *Copland Since 1943*, 209. For the article that discusses the Fantasy, see Arthur Berger, "Aaron Copland's *Piano Fantasy*," *Julliard Review* 5, no. 2 (1957–8): 13–27.

[432] Harold Clurman, "A Modern Master," *Saturday Review*, 28 November 1953, 36.

in the new light that Berger has cast upon it."[433] Berger must have been immensely gratified by this remark.

Despite the time that has elapsed since its publication, Berger's biography still serves as an important Copland text. While more Copland scholarship has emerged over the last few decades, Berger's book offers a unique view of Copland by his contemporary, a fellow composer, and a knowledgeable critic who was close to both the man and his music. The remainder of this chapter will present Berger's most important observations about Copland as contained in the book as well as in numerous articles on the composer he published throughout his career, starting with the most controversial idea and most consequential for Copland's reception to the present day—the idea of "the two Coplands."

The Two Coplands

"Notwithstanding the warm friendship that developed between us, … [Copland] was to persist in the belief that I was one of the commentators responsible for his being cast forever in the role of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."[434] These words written in 2001 are a summation of a decades' worth of debate surrounding the dichotomy between Copland's populist versus his more austere (as Berger put it) musical style. At the crux of the debate was the idea of creating, in Copland's words, "a style that satisfies both us and them," with the former referring to composers and lovers of serious

[433] Lawrence Morton, "Review: *Aaron Copland*," *Musical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (January 1954), 98. Morton was described as an "organist, impresario and curator of both the curiously old and controversially contemporary." See Burt Folkart, "Lawrence Morton Dies; Man Behind the Music," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 1987.

[434] Arthur Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," *Partisan Review* 68, no. 4 (2001): 573.

music, and the latter to the broader public that Berger saw as consumers of Copland's more popular works.[435]

The austere works, as generally defined by Berger, were intended for the concert hall and included the *Piano Variations*, the *Short Symphony* and the *Piano Sonata*, among others. Berger considered Copland's austere style to have reached its pinnacle with the *Piano Variations* of 1930, the work that Berger indisputably admired the most. He wrote that the *Variations* were "like nothing ever conceived before," adding that "as an example of Copland's conciseness we could scarcely find anything better than the *Variations*, and the degree of this conciseness in itself affords us the means of observing his musical devices in their most pristine state."[436] Berger described the work's musical style as "esoteric," and assessed its reception and impact as follows:

> Within modern-musical circles this extraordinary piano work made a profound impression, and went a long way towards establishing him as a composer of great consequence. Outside of these circles, it was regarded as somewhat freakish and inaccessible, and hardly a reference to it was unaccompanied by the epithet, "austere." To this day it is considered forbidding and its appeal is confined to relatively few, though its importance in Copland's development and the development of music in general […] is very considerable indeed.[437]

Berger would later claim that the *Short Symphony* (1933) was more "substantial, more seductive to the senses" than the *Piano Variations*, but the originality of the

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[435] Letter from Aaron Copland to Arthur Berger, 10 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[436] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 43.

[437] Ibid., 25.

Variations and the impact it had on him never waned, and he held it in the highest regard.[438]

The populist style, to which Berger referred using Hindemith's term, "music for use," included pieces "written for cinema, radio, schools, and the picket-line."[439] Specifically, he placed in this category some of Copland's most famous works: ballets *Billy the Kid, Rodeo,* and *Appalachian Spring*; film scores for *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town*; and Americanist-flavored orchestral works *El Salon Mexico, Danzon Cubano, Fanfare for the Common Man,* and *Lincoln Portrait*. As Berger's personal tastes led him to discount these pieces in favor of the more austere works overshadowed by them, he feared the populist style detrimental both to Copland's legacy and his own position as a Copland critic. His desire to promote the austere works over the populist ones—particularly since he could not simply dismiss the longer populist works as occasional—was his reason for formulating the "two Coplands" critical approach.

Berger did not feel threatened by pieces like "Into the Streets May First," as he had no fear that Copland's trajectory would take a permanent shift towards worker songs, although he did find fault with the quality of the song's music. He wrote:

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[438] See Arthur V. Berger, "The Music of Aaron Copland," *Musical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1945): 429.

[439] Arthur Berger, "Music Chronicle: Copland's Piano Sonata," *Partisan Review* 10, no. 2 (1943): 187. Berger makes reference to Hindemith's term *Gebrauchmusik* both in his biography of Copland, and in *Reflections* where he places the term in a fuller historical context. See Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 27 and *Reflections*, 242, n.6.

> It is surprising indeed that a composer who, as everyone knows, very soon afterwards developed an approach that was so wide in its appeal and of such fine workmanship at the same time should so miscalculate the musical capacities of a worker on an actual picket line. The precipitous modulations—one of them when we have barely settled into the main key—as well as a vocal range of almost two octaves could give your worker quite a bit of trouble on a picket line. […] It was not Copland's finest hour (but the good intentions were there).[440]

But since the large-scale populist works such as the ballets could not quite be dismissed as occasional pieces or aberrations, to write and speak publicly about these works, Berger was forced to adopt a deliberately cautious approach: he knew that an overcritical stance would garner him no favors with Copland's admirers or publishers, let alone Copland himself. Therefore, he complimented them, but with reference to the idea that Copland also wrote works he considered more significant.

While Berger's careful expression of his discontent may have sugar-coated things for the layman, it failed to deceive Copland, who was unhappy not only with Berger's opinion, but also the frequency with which he injected it into the public discourse. For example, when he inadvertently stumbled upon a 1943 *Partisan Review* article that dealt extensively with this topic, Copland wrote a congenial, yet defensive, letter to Berger, which stated in part:

[440] Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 571.

> I reserve the right to always practice not what I preach, but what the muse dictates. I think also for the sake of drawing sharp distinctions you rather overdo the dichotomy between my "severe" and "simple" styles. The inference is that only the severe style is really serious. I don't believe that. What I was trying for in the simpler works was only partly a larger audience. They gave me a chance to try for a home-spun musical idiom, similar to what I was trying for in a more hectic fashion in the earlier jazz works. In other words, it was not only musical functionalism that was in question, but also a musical language. I like to think that in *Billy* [*the Kid*] and *Our Town*, and somewhat in *Lincoln* [*Portrait*], I have touched off for myself and others a kind of musical naturalness that we have badly needed—along with "great" works.[441]

The "home-spun" idiom and the "musical naturalness" Copland refers to were the aspects of his populist music that Berger most feared. Among his concerns was the populist works' "easy listening" quality that, as he would later put it, "gave up its secret too easily."[442] This idea appears numerous times in Berger's writings when he expresses his views on the consumability of popular music in general.[443] As far as "popular pieces are concerned," he wrote in 1989, "you go through them too fast—they don't last as long."[444] He worried that Copland would abandon the complex writing found in his austere works to pursue this more pleasing but superficial approach, whether deliberately or unintentionally.

Although Copland did not share Berger's concerns regarding the path his compositional career was taking, Berger offered his unsolicited advice nonetheless.[445]

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[441] Letter from Aaron Copland to Arthur Berger, 10 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[442] Berger, "Copland 1900–1990," 298.

[443] See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion of this topic.

[444] Copland and Perlis, *Copland Since 1943*, 209–210.

[445] Copland to Berger, 10 April 1943.

Berger wanted Copland to integrate the austere and popular aspects of his style into an approach that would satisfy, as he later put it, "both us and them."[446] He asserted that in order to marry the austere and the popular, Copland needed to "write *the* big work: a concerto, or cantata, or symphony." He explained:

> What I expect next is to see you try some of the larger symphonic proportions, a la Shostakovich […]. In this case the music would not simply *appeal* to us by virtue of its sensitivity and good taste, but would "satisfy us" in our desire for a certain complexity which makes it possible for us to live with the music and find ever new and absorbing facets which we might not have noticed at first—little things hidden away in corners, concealed meanings, things in inner voices.[447]

While in Berger's assessment Copland followed this advice to some extent in his subsequent music, starting with Symphony No. 3, now that the narrative of "the two Coplands" was set, the critical conversation frequently returned to the dichotomy between the austere and the populist.

Berger harbored additional concerns about the implications of Copland's move to a populist style. To Berger, Copland's populist works were a betrayal. He felt that Copland had abandoned composers of serious music, especially the young ones who looked up to him as a mentor. During the period when Copland was composing his austere works, he was also involved in organizing concerts and festivals of modernist music, such as the Young Composers Group and the Copland-Sessions Concerts.[448] Berger worried that if Copland shifted his attention and became immersed in writing music for films, ballets, and school programs, he would be

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[446] Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 573.

[447] Letter from Arthur Berger to Aaron Copland, 12 April 1943, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[448] Berger, "The Music of Aaron Copland." 423.

unable to spend time in the trenches with young composers, fighting for the cause of getting serious music programmed and commissioned. As discussed in Chapter 4, Berger was always sympathetic to a composer's need to earn a living. But his stance against Copland's populist works could be read as fueled by an anxiety that his professional choices would contribute to lessening the chance of an entire generation to create and experience serious music—the music that Berger himself valued most.

Despite Copland's commercial success and venerable reputation, Berger continued to maintain throughout his life that his stylistic choices had damaged his reception. In 1985 the critic expressed disappointment when *Appalachian Spring* was performed at Tanglewood's celebration of Copland's eighty-fifth birthday, instead of a "serious," albeit lesser known work. He remarked that Copland's music was not awarded sufficient "intellectual prestige," especially by young composers. He also accused members of the academy of programming "arid," "impotent," and "cerebral" works by other composers, while overlooking Copland's music, as his populist works did not fit their criteria of excellence, while his austere works were either unknown or uninteresting to the programmers.[449] While some of Berger's concerns here may be valid, his argument lacks evidence. He includes no statistical or factual backing for

[449] Arthur Berger, "Success Story," *The New York Review of Books,* 28 February 1985. One explanation for such neglect, Berger admits, is the tremendous technical difficulty of Copland's austere works. The *Short Symphony*, according to him, was programmed and then dropped by both Koussevitzky and Stokowski for that reason. He recalls: "They were both obliged to shelve it when they came face to face with its technical difficulties, especially its jagged lines and rhythmical demands"; see *Reflections,* 12. The piece was premiered by Carlos Chavez in Mexico 23 November 1934. Stokowski did eventually conduct the work with his NBC Orchestra, a concert that Berger reviewed: see Arthur V. Berger, "Stokowski Leads Copland's Music," [*New York Sun*?], 10 January 1944. Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

his claims, and therefore, this portion of the article reads closer to a list of Berger's fears than a true exposé of the shortcomings in Copland reception.[450]

Maintaining that he had merely been "advocating equal rights for the two Coplands,"[451] he had consistently preferred and promoted Copland's austere music over his populist works. On those occasions when he admitted his bias, he explained that he had been "campaigning for adequate exposure for works almost totally occluded by those considered the more accessible ones."[452] In 2001, Berger still maintained that the very existence of the populist works was a detriment to the reception of the austere ones:

> Indeed those audiences to this day are quite unaware that he has written any other kind of music, and some listeners who know this other music, have never quite forgiven him for the periods when he abandoned his less accessible approach for a highly accessible one. They even tend to view his more solid achievements with a certain suspicion, wondering whether the composer of the more popular works could really have been up to meeting the demands.[453]

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[450] A few months after the publication of this essay, Joel Suben, a former student of Berger's and a professor at the College of William and Mary, published a rebuttal to Berger's "Success Story" in the same outlet, in the form of a letter to the editor headed "The Two Coplands." Suben argued that Berger's view was skewed and too focused on Northeastern schools. He writes: "I would suggest beyond the pale—that is, in the teeming music departments and conservatories all over the country—the apotheosis of Copland and the enshrinement of his work, in what must be accepted as at least nominally academic circles, is seemingly permanent." Suben felt that Berger's viewpoint was dated, and while possibly a reality of the 1960s, was not germane to the 1980s. He argues: "The situation today—in which minimalist works are nearly everywhere to be heard and discussed at institutions of higher learning, […] in which apostles of a New Romanticism, with its concern for directness of appeal by means of abandoning abstraction and drawing from the everyday, are holding some prominent chairs in Composition—this situation would seem to invite the identification of Copland as a messiah of present-day academicism, not its antichrist." See Joel Eric Suben, "The Two Coplands," *The New York Review of Books,* 27 June 1985.

[451] Berger, "Copland 1900–1990," 298.

[452] Ibid.

[453] Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 571.

With the benefit of hindsight, Berger finally admitted not only that he had "never been able to share the view that there was no sharp dichotomy between the two approaches."[454] Troubling as this belief was to the composer, Berger's decades of writing on "the two Coplands" proved profoundly influential, and remain a fixture of Copland studies to this day.

Another of Berger's long-standing beliefs about Copland's music was that both of his stylistic manners incorporated a conscious and deliberate Americanism. Berger recognized this trait, making sure to praise it in the works of which he approved, even as he chastised others, in which he felt the composer had gone too far. It was a delicate balance, but as will be evident in the discussion below, Berger's insistence on walking this tightrope allowed him to offer interesting analytical insights into a broad range of Copland's works.

Copland as an American Composer

While he generally disapproved of their frequency and prominence in his works, Berger insisted that Copland made the most of the American elements that influenced his style. He asserted that, "for its indigenous aspects alone, Copland's music must remain an achievement of American culture."[455] Yet, identifying these "indigenous" elements and demonstrating how they came together effectively in Copland's works proved a more complicated matter. At the most fundamental level, Berger identified in Copland's music the trademark influences of jazz and folk songs, the two genres of

[454]Berger, "Copland and the Audience of the Thirties," 571.

[455] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* 90.

American musical vernacular most commonly sampled or alluded to by composers striving to obtain an indigenous sound. Berger asserted that Copland's treatment of this borrowed material was superior to that of his colleagues. Nevertheless, as will be seen, no matter how he camouflaged them as praise, his comments frequently express implicit disappointment at Copland's "lowbrow" interests.

The first vernacular genre that Berger identified as having influenced Copland was jazz. Berger defined the years immediately following Copland's return to the United States after studying with Nadia Boulanger as a "repatriation" period, writing:

> [Copland] knew that his next work imposed a grave problem—to develop a more specifically American idiom after having absorbed so much of the European during his student days. To do so, moreover, without sacrificing the invaluable lessons he had learned from masters abroad. Jazz offered an obvious solution.[456]

As discussed in Chapter 2, Berger disapproved of composers whose serious music was laden with jazz elements and/or shaped by jazz influences. Yet, he was less critical of Copland's jazz-inspired works than those of his contemporaries. This is evident in his comparison between the symphonic jazz works of Copland and George Gershwin. Berger asserted that Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was constructed by taking jazz and "diluting it with tone-poems in the tradition of Liszt."[457] He also suggested that Gershwin was attempting to fit his "popular gifts into the frame of large forms he had not mastered." Conversely, he claimed that Copland had mastered these forms.[458] Berger appears to have recognized the likelihood that his, and perhaps

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[456] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 11; note that Berger uses the term "Repatriation" as a section heading.

[457] Ibid.

[458] Ibid., 13.

Copland's, references to jazz in connection with the latter's music might generate controversy. In a 1945 article on Copland, he attempted to clarify his usage of the term:

> Jazz theorists and historians, who tend towards a certain pedantry, may object to Copland's and my own use of the term "jazz" for what they may regard as simply the "popular" or "commercial" music of Tin Pan Alley. What we have in mind, however, are the more sophisticated products of the 'twenties, sometimes even involving a changing bar-line. These are certainly closer to pure jazz than current "swing" is. One cannot define an idiom in terms of whether or not it is being used to serve a commercial end. The jazz devices overflow the rigid boundaries of what is referred to as pure, sincere jazz. And it is the jazz devices themselves, rather than the routinized pattern in which Tin Pan Alley invested them, that concern us here.[459]

It appears that Berger knew enough about jazz at least to differentiate it from swing. Nevertheless, his remark about not being able to define an idiom by its commercial use or lack thereof is strange, given that his reservations about jazz, expressed elsewhere and discussed in depth later in this chapter, seem to have been centered on its association with popular song. In any event, the musical underpinnings of Berger's impressions of the influence of jazz on Copland seem both simplistic and filtered through Copland's own statements on the matter, one of which is quoted in Berger's book:

> With the Concerto I felt I had done all I could with the idiom, considering its limited scope. True, it was an easy way to be American in musical terms, but all American music could not possibly be confined to two dominant moods: the "blues" and the snappy number. The characteristic rhythmic element of jazz […] being independent of mood, yet purely indigenous, will undoubtedly continue to be used in serious native music.[460]

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[459] Berger, "The Music of Aaron Copland," 441–2, n.7.

[460] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 49.

Copland's remark about jazz's "rhythmic element" in his *Concerto* is limited to certain syncopated patterns. Berger commented on the continued presence in Copland's music of the "more general types of syncopation, equally suggestive of jazz," but argued that "the developments to which they are subjected often remove them very far indeed from the character of the source."[461] It seems, thus, that in Berger's line of reasoning, jazz influence continued because syncopation remained; it lessened because the patterns involved and the way they were treated resembled less, to his ear, whatever jazz he had heard. Similarly, with regard to jazz influences on Copland's pitch organization, Berger noted "the alternating major and minor third of 'blues.'" He opined that, "used melodically, thirds often point to jazz origin in Copland even without the modal duplicity. The interval is, in fact, his trademark—notably in its descending form, in which the blues element is stressed."[462] This again is Berger's impression, based on his likely limited and anecdotal knowledge of blues. It is possible that when he wrote approvingly of the gradual reduction of jazz influence in Copland's works of the 1930s, arguing that, as "demotic elements of jazz are relinquished, or at least not overtly expressed, […] the feeling content becomes more rarefied," he was referring to the reduction in the more overt and noticeable musical markers that he associated with jazz.[463] It was his way of saying that Copland's style had absorbed characteristics initially inspired or influenced by jazz,

[461] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 50.

[462] Ibid., 50–51.

[463] Ibid., 22–3.

but the composer no longer consciously sought to emulate its sound, or lean on it as a crutch or gimmick.

Folk music was another "indigenous" genre that Berger listed among Copland's sources. In his writings, Berger emphasized Copland's careful selection of folk tunes, and the masterful way he dissected and repurposed this raw material. He believed that Copland's approach exhibited a sophistication that other composers who had used the same source lacked; that he "found the means of idealizing American folk tunes in their own terms and in terms of his own native experience—unlike a preceding generation which glibly couched them in the most stereotyped European moulds."[464] Berger argued that Copland's approach made his pieces simultaneously more original and somehow more American, describing his compositional process to the readers of *Tempo* thus:

> Even before developing a folk tune, he has already transformed it in its mere presentation—partly by the setting, and partly by actual melodic changes. And it is by means of these changes that Copland contrives not only to invest the material with his own personality, but at the same time to place in relief intrinsic properties which are, on the one hand, most striking in a purely musical way, and, on the other, most typical of the broad genre of folk music of which the tune is a part.[465]

Berger felt that one of Copland's strengths as a composer working with folk material was his ability to bring out what he called the "character of a tune." He claimed that Copland had accomplished this partly through a rhythmic manipulation of the borrowed melody:

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[464] Arthur V. Berger, "Aspects of Aaron Copland's Music," *Tempo* 10 (1945): 5

[465] Ibid., 3.

> In *Lincoln Portrait*, […] "Springfield Mountain" is stretched out so that each one of its first few notes occupies about the time of a whole measure of the original. Thus, a frivolous ditty now expresses majesty. Further breadth is added by spacing which results from lengthening the note at the end of each four-note group. […] The ballet *Billy the Kid* […] uses a jocular air which is similarly stretched out to give it a tender quality.[466]

In his monograph on Copland, Berger offered a detailed, nuanced, and insightful analysis of the composer's rhythmic manipulation of the borrowed folk material in the ballet *Rodeo,* and the effect produced by this technique. Below is an excerpt of his discussion of the first movement:

> The ballet *Rodeo* also provides some fine instances of the protraction of significant details. About half-way through the first movement […] the trombone introduces "If he'd be a Buckaroo," quoting the melody quite literally except for the spacing between the couplets. The original proceeds in regular quarters and eighths, but one extra half note at the close of the first couplet places the symmetry out of joint. Motivated by this deviation, Copland inserts still more protracted spacing between sections of the melody, in the form of several long grand pauses of the full orchestra, each of them as many as two or more common-time measures in duration. The shock element of these long rests adds to the saucy character of the melody; and an additional contribution in this direction is the delay on two of the up-beats, in imitation of a common license which folk-song singers delight in taking.[467]

Earlier in the monograph, Berger used *Billy the Kid* as an example of another method by which Copland transformed folk material: his treatment of the accompaniment. He noted: "In the first six measures, [Copland] adheres to the conventional accompaniment of the most common song collection. As we proceed, however, we observe the process of transformation at work. The accompaniment in particular becomes more venturesome."[468]

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[466] Arthur V. Berger, "Aspects of Aaron Copland's Music," *Tempo* 10 (1945): 3.

[467] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* 63–64.

[468] Ibid., 62.

Indeed, Berger was always careful to stress the fine craftsmanship underlying Copland's treatment of folk music. In his *Tempo* article, he took great pains to point out the composer's ability to manipulate the borrowed material in sophisticated ways, including "instances of triple canons, and contrapuntal combinations of two themes or of a theme with a part of itself." Despite such technical complexity, however, Berger asserted that in these pieces, "neither folk songs nor musical pyrotechnics are presented for their own sake." Instead, Copland's "primary concern appears to have been how much beauty and substance could be achieved by their adaptation and manipulation."[469]

Berger was so impressed with Copland's ability to transform the borrowed folk material with his craft that he actually declared the composer to have "brought more of the indigenous to folk music than it brought to him":

> Traditional tunes provided extra materials to work with, but the materials themselves were merely so many different specific manifestations of qualities that had already been present in his music.[470]

Indeed, Berger argued that Copland's engagement with folk music was beneficial to the latter, as several little known folk songs made their way into the public consciousness through the dissemination of Copland's music.[471] Furthermore, his folk-infused pieces influenced a new generation of composers who also began to

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[469] Berger, "Aspects of Aaron Copland's Music," 5.

[470] Berger, "The Music of Aaron Copland," 441–2.

[471] While at first glance this argument may seem disingenuous, I can recall on two separate occasions when I realized that a tune I attributed to Copland was originally a folk/cowboy song. Copland's "Old American Songs" are frequently performed by vocalists. These songs most likely would have never survived in the public consciousness as long as they have, especially in modern times, if not for Copland's interest in them.

explore ways of integrating folk music into the fabric of their compositions. Several of the resulting works proved somewhat overly Copland-esque in nature; Berger specifically cited Elie Siegmeister, Gail Kubik, and the early Leo Smit as composers guilty of such imitation.[472] This was clearly not a direction he encouraged; he argued that the techniques are "so well crystallized in Copland's music—at times even unduly formalized—that it is doubtful that they have within them the potentiality for so much further exploration."[473] Berger's disapproval is not surprising: as we have seen, he was uneasy about the idea of fusion between art and vernacular traditions. Moreover, he clearly had a difficult time envisioning anyone superseding Copland's accomplishments in this area, thus precluding the possibility of compositional innovation he deemed essential to all good music (see Chapter 6).

Berger never offered a direct comparison between Copland's use of folk music and Stravinsky's. In 1985, however, he recalled a conversation with Copland on this subject. The latter purportedly asserted that, after first encountering Stravinsky's works in 1921, he was "struck by the strong Russian element in his music," adding: "I have no doubt that this strongly influenced me to try to find a way to a distinctively American music."[474] Yet, in his Copland book, Berger invoked the idea of the composer as the "Brooklyn Stravinsky," implying that the designation was common but in no way linking it to a common interest in folklore. He wrote:

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[472] Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 93.

[473] Ibid., 94.

[474] Arthur Berger, "Success Story," *The New York Review of Books*, 28 February 1985.

> One sometimes spoke in those days of a "Brooklyn Stravinsky." Today this seems curious, with both composers better known. Did one mean Stravinsky was a springboard for the young man's autonomous development? If so, who could serve this function better for someone of Copland's lucidity? True, the future of the primitivist idiom of *Le Sacre* and *Les Noces* was limited. Copland's *Dance Symphony* adds little to what had already been done with that idiom, and even Stravinsky had already realized that it was exhausted. But the principles enunciated in the *Octuor* (1923) of the Russian master were enormously plastic. One may marvel at the power of its originator to suggest to Copland a point of departure from which to proceed, in a very short time, to the remarkable individuality of the *Piano Variations* of 1930.[475]

In his analysis of Copland's Third Symphony, on the other hand, Berger not only compared Copland and Stravinsky's approach to borrowed folk material, he implied that Copland elevated the art of integrating folk song into an original composition beyond Stravinsky—or at least beyond the level achieved in Stravinsky's early works. Indeed, he argued for the "classicism" of Copland's approach, writing: "It must be stressed that the indigenous aspects [in the Third Symphony] are the more elusive kind to be found in a Haydn symphony with its evocation of Croatian folklore or stately court minuets, rather than the specific kind that exists in […] Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*."[476] Regrettably Berger did not elaborate on this idea either in his book or in subsequent Copland writings, leaving virtually unexamined a subject still ripe for exploration.

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[475] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 42. Berger never identified when the label originated or with whom. My own search for its roots has not been fruitful, but it has appeared in scholarship on both Copland and Stravinsky. One Stravinsky scholar who uses it routinely is Johnathan Cross; see his *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7; and "Stravinsky into the Twenty-First Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 249. See also Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schonberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97. Other scholars who use the term actually cite Berger as their source; see: Nina Perlove, "Inherited Sound Images: Native American Exoticism in Aaron Copland's *Duo for Flute and Piano*," *American Music* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 65, and Gayle Murchinson, *The American Stravinsky: The Style and Aesthetics of Copland's New American Music, the Early Works, 1921–1938* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 30.

[476] Arthur Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 73.

Berger saw the appropriation and transformation of jazz and folk sources as only one aspect of Copland's American sound. He noted the association of Copland's music with the vastness of nature, especially the prairie, partially achieved through the use of wide intervallic spacings. He also proposed that this "natural" sound may have spiritual affiliations as well, suggesting that the composer's personal life experiences were reflected in his music: "By penetrating to the essence of his subject matter, Copland naturally sees not only what is particular in it, but also what is universal. And perceiving the universal he also recognizes its relation to his own experience."[477] Berger attested that Copland had the ability to relate to that which was beyond his own immediate circumstances. Comparing the alienation of big-city living with the endless silence of the prairie, the critic argued that this connection allowed Copland to successfully comprehend and express the loneliness of a cowboy, despite never having experienced the Wild West lifestyle for himself. He wrote: "[Copland] can grasp the solitude and aridness he himself has experienced in the completely antithetical setting of his own city streets, where the sense of isolation may be all the greater because it is felt in the midst of hundreds of people passing by."[478]

This type of commentary on a spiritual nature of a musical work was rare for Berger. It is as if, unable to uncover the secret behind Copland's American sound in his compositional technique, he could find no other explanation for what he was hearing than these kinds of poetic musings. Although it strays far from the critical and

[477] Berger, "Aspects of Aaron Copland's Music," 5.

[478] Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 92.

analytical approach so common to Berger's writings, he returned to the idea more than once.[479]

In his 1948 review of Copland's Third Symphony, Berger expressed satisfaction that in that work the composer evidently distanced himself from folk and jazz influences, proclaiming it a "thoroughly healthy reaction against his predispositions of the last decade or so."[480] He was also elated that Copland had not attached any "official" programmatic content to the symphony. Yet Berger also pointed out that Copland did not fully succeed in purging his compositional style of extra-musical elements. He felt that the piece seemed to evoke "a glorified and expansive hymn—of prayer, of praise, of sorrow, of patriotic sentiment." Berger found this unsurprising: he explained that these elements had been unconsciously embedded in Copland's style via what he referred to as an "absorption process."[481] Five years after this review, as part of an in-depth analysis of the Third Symphony in his Copland book, Berger asserted that the composer's attempts to not "say" anything specific resulted in him "saying many different things, although they [were] difficult to pin down."[482]

Berger's pleasure at the Third Symphony's abstraction stemmed directly from his anxieties about the international reception of Copland's music as a whole. Berger wished Copland to be accepted as a "universal" composer, not as, from the European

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[479] See also Berger, "Aspects of Aaron Copland's Music," 5.

[480] Arthur V. Berger, "The Symphony of Aaron Copland," *Tempo* 9 (1948), 23.

[481] Berger, "The Symphony of Aaron Copland," 23.

[482] Berger, *Aaron Copland,* 73.

point of view, an exotic "American." He wanted his works to be appreciated for their creative merit rather than their extra-musical associations. As early as 1945, Berger attempted in *Musical Quarterly* to situate Copland as a composer whose Americanism might inform, but should not overshadow, his international status:

> But whatever Copland does has the recognizable virtues of a genuinely creative artist. With the limitations peculiar to many composers of our time, he can accomplish much more than most of the others. He is at last an American we may place unapologetically beside the recognized creative figures of any other country. […] We are not, therefore, obliged to credit Copland merely with what he has done to establish an indigenous style, for his achievements go much deeper.[483]

Berger's preference for Copland's abstract works without a distinct nationalist flavor recalls the critic's broader anxiety about the reception of America abroad—specifically about the worldwide perception of his country only as a source of popular music and culture (see Chapters 4 and 6). His desire that Copland and other American composers eschew the influences of folk music and jazz can also be associated with his career-long critical preference for complex, intellectually challenging, technically innovative, "serious" music. His attitude, which could today be defined as "modernist," was particularly prominent in American intellectual circles in the early years of the Cold War when Berger's career was at its height and his critical voice was at its most prominent. The fact that he had consistently exhibited and promoted such views since the 1930s, when their leftist opposites were in vogue, lent his opinion even more weight in the 1940s and 50s. It would be reasonable to argue that he not only reflected the modernist aesthetics of the early Cold-War years, but helped shape its ideas and its rhetoric. His sympathy with the political left did not extend to

[483] Berger, "The Music of Aaron Copland," 443.

the populist aesthetic principles often associated with it, either in general or, in particular, with regard to his opinion of Copland's populist works.

Conclusion

Throughout the voluminous corpus of Berger's writings on Copland, he consistently argued that no matter how disappointed he was with something Copland had done, Copland had nevertheless done it better than anyone else. While he consistently directed his readers' attention to the perceived shortcomings of Copland's populist, jazz-and folk-influenced works, he cloaked his criticism in complimentary language. Moreover, his compliments were quite sincere: Berger's overriding high estimation of Copland rested on what he saw as the composer's ability to rise above his competition to create populist, Americanist music of superior skill and artistry. As he put it in one of his essays on the composer, "the degree to which he maintained his integrity and the quality and self-subsistence of his music through all [his] *Piéces d'occasion* is quite astonishing."[484] Ultimately, Berger's admiration for Copland, combined with his disdain for populism, created an irreconcilable aesthetic conflict that colored the entire body of his critical writings on the composer. That said, Berger's Copland criticism contains undoubtedly some of his most powerful, insightful, and influential prose. It defined the Copland narrative in both scholarly and public discourse for

[484] Berger, "The Symphony of Aaron Copland," 20. Berger even praised Copland's film music, despite his overall skepticism for the genre. He implied that Copland's scores transcended those of the established American film composers, and therefore he elevated the quality of a musical genre that, prior to his arrival, had been dominated by lesser talents. Berger wrote: "In America men who specialize in this medium, and are little known outside of it, are usually entrusted with the task"; therefore, "Copland's arrival in Hollywood marked something of a milestone," and "helped raise the standards of Hollywood music in general." See Berger, *Aaron Copland*, 86–87.

decades to come, and encapsulated Berger's own broader views on the role of music in society and American music's place in the world.

Chapter 6: Innovation in Composition

If modernism is to be defined as a commitment to the necessity of artistic innovation, Berger was a modernist throughout his career, as he believed innovation to be a fundamental trait of successful compositions and composers. His own compositional output exemplifies this belief, which also pervades his writings, irrespective of the genre. In his reviews, for instance, Berger would grant a composer leniency if he judged an identified shortcoming in a new work to result from a period of experimentation or transition to a new style. This is not to infer that Berger expressed approval of the product or the process of such a transition where he did not believe it warranted, but his criticism was less biting toward those of his colleagues who, in his opinion, were striving to grow and develop their craft. Such an encouraging and sympathetic attitude is not surprising considering that not only did his own compositions explore, through the years, a multitude of shifting styles, but his interest in innovation was also reflected in his tendency to edit his own works repeatedly over time, as he was driven continuously to rethink the compositional process and re-envision the final product.[485]

[485] Consider, for instance, Rodney Lister's astute assessment of Berger as a composer: "At first acquaintance, the music of Arthur Berger presents a perplexing assortment of styles, which leads one to wonder just who he is. Is he the American neo-classicist, a disciple of Aaron Copland […]? Is he the dean of American twelve-tone composers? Or is he the composer of austere post-serial works? Once one establishes to one's satisfaction that all these styles are represented in his repertory, one is left to contemplate how the composer came to write in so many different styles. […] Integrity and a commonly evinced concern for consistency of musical operations and expression are, in fact, what Berger's various musical compositions have in common. These elements mark his compositions as the product of one mind—a mind keenly concerned with the developments in the intellectual life of the world in general and of music in particular." See Rodney Lister, "Arthur Berger: The Progress of a Method," *American Music* 13, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 56–57.

Berger's desire for the new was not limitless, and he saw it as a means, rather than an end in itself. If a fellow composer, in his judgment, went too far down an experimental path, he would express disapproval, accusing that composer of resorting to gimmicks rather than practicing genuine innovation. This chapter will examine Berger's critical approaches to four of his composer contemporaries, Charles Ives (1874–1954), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Samuel Barber (1910–1981), and John Cage (1912–1992), using them as case studies to explore Berger's aesthetic of innovation as reflected in his criticism.[486]

Specifically, as we shall see by comparing Berger's responses to Ives and to Milhaud, the use of modernist compositional techniques was not sufficient for him to declare a piece innovative if he distrusted its composer's motivations. A comparison of Berger's criticism of Barber vs. Cage, meanwhile, establishes what he believed to be suitable boundaries of compositional innovation—the boundaries that both composers transgressed, in his opinion, albeit in different directions. For the three Americans in the group, Berger's writings also demonstrate how high he saw the stakes to be on the question of innovation, as he assessed and worried about each composer's international standing as a representative of the United States. Cumulatively, Berger's attitude toward the four composers discussed in this chapter can be seen to represent a continuum, from one extreme to the other: insufficient innovation (Barber); fake, skin-deep innovation (Ives); genuine innovation (Milhaud); and flawed innovation that goes too far (Cage).

[486] Although Ives's compositional activities mainly predate Berger's career as a critic, Berger was a member of the generation that drove the early reception of Ives's music and defined the parameters of scholarly and critical discourse that underlined that reception.

Misleading Innovation: Charles Ives

As both his critical writings and his *Reflections* suggest, Berger was both intrigued and perplexed by Charles Ives. In many ways he considered himself a proponent and an admirer of the composer, and he was pleased to have been a member of the Young Composers Group, an organization that helped introduce the works of Ives to the American public. In *Reflections,* Berger noted with pride that he was invited to become a part of this group by no less a personage than Henry Cowell, whom he rightly saw as Ives's chief advocate.[487]

As a young critic, Berger was enthralled with Ives. In his 1933 review of *Set for Theatre*, he wrote:

> Though markedly cerebral in structure, the chords being built on mathematical basis, the product was a fabric of exquisite sonorescence, the harmonic overtones having been conceived with utmost skill and the melodic line wrought with subtle latitude. What is most remarkable is the fact that it was written in about 1906, and that Ives has since grown in artistic stature. Notwithstanding, American musicians decry the exigency of a vital native school, while this cyclopean figure is in our midst.[488]

The more mature Berger never offered such unabashed praise. By the 1940s, he appears to have developed deep-rooted skepticism regarding the supposedly revolutionary nature of Ives's music, and he maintained such a view for the rest of his career. The nature of that skepticism is revealed in a 1954 article, in which Berger confesses, playing off the title of Ives's piece *The Unanswered Question*: "Of all the unanswered questions, the most fundamental for me bears on Ives as an innovator."[489]

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[487] *Reflections,* 28.

[488] A[rthur].V. B[erger]., "Pan American Association," [*New York Daily Mirror*], February 1932.

[489] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Ives in Retrospect," *Saturday Review,* 31 July 1954, 62.

Berger suspected that Ives's music was more conservative than was generally believed. He worried that his innovation was merely skin-deep, and that the high level of dissonance on the surface of Ives's music hid the fact that the composer's language was more often than not traditionally tonal. He wrote:

> It was under Cowell's aegis around 1930 that I belonged to a group that was "discovering" Ives and we made much then, as many still do today, of his use of certain dissonant devices prior to the European leaders who claim credit for them. But just as often he was apt to write in a most conservative vein, which has led me to wonder if his dissonance was, perhaps, a coating to be applied or left off at will, and if deep down he were not actually devoted to the conservatism of his teachers. [490]

In addition, in *Reflections* Berger somewhat dismissively described Ives's music as being "larded with folksongs including hymns, patriotic anthems, marches, and the like."[491] Underlying such open disapproval is Berger's conviction that, despite Ives's professed belief that one should not resort to gimmicks in order to create an American sound, he was not practicing what he preached. With respect to Ives's orchestral music, in particular, Berger admitted to being "troubled by the sense that the infrastructure is essentially a traditional European one which has been fractured" by inserted Americanisms:

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[490] Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Ives in Retrospect," 62. Berger was early in making this argument. In 1987, Maynard Solomon challenged the idea that Ives's work lay outside the "mainstream of music history," calling for more accurate dating of his works, to allow for accounting of his influences (Maynard Soloman, "Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 468). Scholars since have pursued the idea that Ives was not as separate from tradition as he portrayed himself to be. In 1990, J. Peter Burkholder expressed sentiments parallel to Berger: "When one becomes familiar with the music Ives wrote during his studies at Yale and follows the evolution of his music in traditional genres—his symphonies, tone poems, sonatas, and art songs—it becomes clear that this music lies squarely within the European tradition, extending and transforming the aesthetic assumptions and compositional procedures of late Romantic tonal music in ways that closely parallel the music of European composers from Mahler to Bartók." See J. Peter Burkholder, "Critique of Tonality in the Early Experimental Music of Charles Ives," *Music Theory Spectrum* 12, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990): 222.

[491] *Reflections*, 31.

> What makes the music so modern and dissonant is the way elements not too original are pulled out of shape, and if one takes a close-up of the music, as I like to do, the extraordinary atmosphere, the drama, the inspiration dissolve, and one becomes aware of a certain sheer disorder.[492]

The uneasy relationship between the quoted American vernacular and stylistic modernism in Ives's scores was a recurring theme in Berger's writings on the composer. In a 1954 column for the *Saturday Review*, he wrote that Ives's Second Symphony, "except that it pioneered in American nationalism by its use of folk song, might have been written at mid-nineteenth century."[493] Berger also hypothesized that the novelty of these quotations—the "effects," as he called them—automatically convinced the listeners that they had to be hearing something of high quality, an iconoclastic work, and caused them to miss the conservative undertones of the piece.

Berger argued that Ives's unwillingness to study in Europe proved a hindrance to the development of his compositional style. He did not believe that European training would have had a deleterious effect on Ives's goal to write "American" music, as the latter feared, writing: "Ives, at the turn of the century, was going to write American music *at any cost*; and he stubbornly resisted the years of study abroad that were considered indispensable for any aspiring composer."[494] Berger also suggested that Ives might have been the victim of poor timing: "By the late Twenties, when he was no longer composing, there finally emerged a progressive group of composers who went abroad and returned without losing their integrity as

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[492] *Reflections,* 28.

[493] Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Ives in Retrospect," 62.

[494] Berger, Draft of "Crosscurrents in American European Music Today," Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

Americans."[495] He argued that the experience of studying abroad would have opened Ives up to new ideas and enhanced his ability to develop an innovative and individual musical style: "I think lacking proper contacts, Ives failed to realize his gifts fully and remained in some ways a primitive, which accounts for both his charm and crudity."[496]

Berger asserted that a further detriment to Ives's development was that he composed much of his music without the immediate prospect of its consumption by the listeners. This prevented him from receiving feedback from fellow musicians and audiences. In regard to the Third Sonata, Berger wrote:

> The outer movements, soothing in character, have rambling improvisations on hymn tunes, especially where the piano goes off by itself. Moments like these in Ives […] resulted from a lack of responsibility to audience. Too much is made of the fact that, earning his livelihood as a successful insurance man, he wrote self-effacingly without worrying about recognition. Certainly, a critical check from the outside might have helped him realize just where his notable inspirations lay. […] A critical check might also have helped him pare off the mere self-expression and set his ingenuities in relief with significant and communicable form.[497]

Berger also saw this lack of consideration extending to potential performers, pointing to the omission of important performance indications in many of Ives's manuscripts—a practice he saw as amateurish. In a 1946 review of the Second String Quartet he highlighted this purported deficiency: "These players have supplied the dynamic markings for balance, omitted by Ives in his unprofessional approach. This

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[495] A[rthur] B[erger], "His Aim Was to Be Solely American" *New York Times Book Review*, 9 January 1955.

[496] Ibid.

[497] Arthur Berger, "Three New Sonatas," *New York Sun*, 12 November 1946.

approach is also evident in the music itself, even though last night's superb interpretation made it more plausible."[498]

But what seems to have bothered Berger the most was the general attitude of hero-worship that surrounded Ives in the late forties and early fifties, and the corresponding lack of recognition of what Berger had so clearly seen in him: a composer whose innate conservatism was only barely veiled by surface modernism. While Berger was proud to have been part of the original "cult" that helped get Ives discovered, he was less enthusiastic about the subsequent proponents of Ives. In 1950, he wrote:

> The Charles Ives cult has done a service in getting his music played, and more recently, recorded. But its fanatic devotion to every last note its idol put to paper, including many of the weaker ones, leaves some people wondering at times what all the shouting is about. Cults are like that, and now we may judge for ourselves where the inspirations lie.[499]

In the end, Ives remained a perplexing figure for Berger, who had never come to a comfortable conclusion about his legacy. He also expressed trepidation about Ives as a person, and declined an opportunity to visit the older composer when invited. Berger admitted regretting his decision not to meet Ives, which he explained resulted from a fear of antagonizing the man who was known to become easily upset and to retire to his room should he be displeased with the conversation at hand. Berger recalled: "I was an argumentative young man and I was afraid my leftist

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[498] A[rthur].V. B[erger]., "Walden Quartet," [unknown newspaper; Berger wrote for both the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald Tribune* at the time], 8 October 1946.

[499] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 30 December, 1950, 46.

politics would clash with his political orientation; also I might let slip a remark that revealed my reservations with regards to his music."[500]

Despite his reservations, Berger never diminished the importance of Ives's influence on American music, and as late as *Reflections* described him as "a figure who looms on the American music scene and who provides an experience we do not get elsewhere. This should be enough to stamp the mark of immortality on his brow."[501]

Hidden Innovation: Darius Milhaud

Berger was considerably less reserved in his assessment of Milhaud, nor did it change over the course of his career. They also knew each other personally, beginning in 1940, when Milhaud was hired to teach alongside Berger at Mills College. Milhaud became a mentor and friend to his younger colleague, providing feedback on his pieces, which would help bolster his self-confidence as a composer. Berger described Milhaud as possessing a "personal sweetness," and when his position at Mills College was cut, he bemoaned leaving behind both Milhaud and his wife.

Unlike Ives, an acknowledged innovator whose ideas Berger at various points saw as misguided, he singled out Milhaud in the early thirties as a truly progressive composer, "one of the most genuinely creative talents of our day, who remains deplorably neglected," as his music was not played enough by either major orchestras or "organizations presumably dedicated to the propagation of significant new

[500] *Reflections*, 31.

[501] Ibid.

music."[502] A decade later, his high opinion had not waned: in 1944, Berger reiterated that Milhaud was "a leading composer of our time whose music is heard regrettably little."[503] In 1956, he continued to lament Milhaud's lack of popularity, and especially that a composer as prolific could receive so little attention:

> This distinguished French musician, capable of tossing off a sonata or fugue on the train or while waiting his turn on a slowly moving line, has at sixty exceeded his Opus 320 and is one of the most prolific composers of our time.[504]

In a profile of Milhaud he wrote for *American Music Lover* in early 1936, Berger hailed him as a visionary for his use of polytonality and the manner in which he incorporated jazz into his works. Describing Milhaud as the "systemizer and chief promulgator of *polytonality*," Berger highlighted as particularly consequential his works of the WWI era, "the same epoch of the much celebrated Stravinsky and Schoenberg revolutions, from a period in fact, when everyone more or less enlisted in the campaign toward the new and grotesque." Berger, wary of the extent to which novelties were introduced into the music of this period, was less so in the case of Milhaud, asserting: "I do not praise such specious novelty which appeared in great abundance, but only such innovation as was set forth clearly and articulately, as in Stravinsky and Milhaud."[505]

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[502] A[rthur]. V. B[erger]. "Opera on the Recent Records," [publication not identified, early 1930s] and Arthur V. Berger, edited proofs of "Darius Milhaud," *American Music Lover* (February 1936), 296.

[503] Arthur V. Berger, "Monteux Leads Milhaud's Music," [unknown publication], 10 July 1944.

[504] Arthur Berger: "The World of Darius Milhaud," *New York Tribune*, 17 May 1953.

[505] Arthur V. Berger, edited proof of "Darius Milhaud," *American Music Lover* (February 1936), 294.

Berger argued that Milhaud's use of polytonality in these early works was more nuanced than the mere simultaneity of two keys. Of *Deuzieme Sonate* for violin and piano, he stated:

> There is a more pliable, less deliberate type of polytonality more conducive to subtle and flexible artistic effects. Here we have a fundamental tonality definitely established from the onset upon which other tonalities are subsequently superimposed, until the end where the foreign tonalities are abandoned or imperceptibly blended with the original which is clearly reaffirmed. [506]

Berger expressed his appreciation of Milhaud's conscious efforts to avoid the Romanticism of Franck and others who followed in the path of Wagner: "He rarely loses himself in the turgid atmosphere of sentiment and usually remains with his feet implanted on firm ground." He also noted Milhaud's avoidance of what he called *Debussysme*, stating that to him, "most gratifying in the more mature Milhaud is the absence of those endless and constantly modulating phrases of the impressionist imitators."[507]

Berger singled out Milhaud's jazz-inspired 1923 ballet *La Création du monde* as innovative, as it contained "real American jazz," or what he called "elemental Harlem stuff, [as opposed to] the elegant product of Broadway."[508] Such praise for a jazz-influenced piece of art music was rare for Berger.[509] Yet, despite his misgivings about the style, he was impressed enough with Milhaud to state unequivocally that

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[506] Berger, edited proof of "Darius Milhaud," 298.

[507] Ibid., 315.

[508] Ibid., 300.

[509] For Berger's opinion on jazz and jazz influences in classical music, see Chapters 2 and 5.

"the *Creation* seems to me the most successful attempt that has been made here or abroad to embody jazz in lasting form."[510]

As early as his 1936 profile of Milhaud, Berger warned that the sheer volume and variety of that composer's output may have resulted in his innovation being overlooked. As he explained it, "hearing one or two works […] is often misleading, since these may belong to an earlier period or to one of the lighter moments which, while productive of charming results, are not representative, and may discourage the serious-minded musician from hearing more." As an example of such a misleading work, Berger suggested *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* of 1920, commenting that if "we were to judge Milhaud on [this piece] alone, we should not think very highly of him as a musician."[511]

Furthermore, Berger proposed that it was Milhaud's early association with Les Six that might have prevented general recognition of him as a serious, innovative composer. "Milhaud's admonishments have not," he asserted, "kept [musicians and critics] from persisting for over three decades in a view of the 'Six' as a gang of pranksters."[512] Berger argued that while membership in Les Six afforded Milhaud a means of promotion for his works, it was also detrimental to his compositional development, as he "was obliged time and time again […] to defend 'serious music'

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[510] Berger, edited proof of "Darius Milhaud," 315.

[511] Ibid., 300. Berger did not necessarily dislike the piece, although he did not see it as "serious" music, stating: "*Le Boeuf sur le Toit* […] has questionable value if taken in its own right. As satire, however, as part of the campaign to ridicule pompousness, it is justifiable; it perhaps also gave amusement to the sophisticated."

[512] Milhaud addresses this issue in his autobiography, stating that critics "treated me as a legpuller and joker incapable of serious thought." See Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music: An Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 161.

against the claims of the group's literary protagonist, Jean Cocteau, who vaunted music of the circus and dance hall."[513] Berger also wondered whether, thanks to the group identity assumed for Milhaud as a member of Les Six, the initial introduction of polytonality in his works might have been interpreted as satirical, and therefore not recognized for its uniqueness and complexity.[514] Yet while Berger sympathized with Milhaud's dislike of the "prankster" stereotype, he also seemed to encourage him to embrace it, posing the question: "Does he have to deny, we wonder, that the work is humorous in character if he is to maintain that its artistic intentions are serious?"[515] The critic seems to suggest here that Milhaud could be a more successful advocate for his own music not by fighting against the prevailing narrative, but by reshaping it instead after his own image.

In 1951, Berger expressed surprise at the direction Milhaud's polytonality was taking him. He asserted that "Milhaud had become hardened to the combining of instruments that blithely go their own way, almost as if they were playing different works together."[516] The comment was occasioned by the critic's experience hearing *Octet* of 1949, which was composed as two quartets that could stand independently. According to Berger, separately each quartet possessed the "general character of any other Milhaud quartet (and also the charm and litheness)," but their simultaneous performance had left the critic unmoved: he found that "each [quartet] keeps all the

[513] Arthur Berger, "'Les Six' Up to Date," *Saturday Review*, 25 December 1954, 50.

[514] Berger, proof of "Darius Milhaud," 297–298.

[515] Arthur Berger, "The World of Darius Milhaud," *New York Tribune*, 17 May 1953.

[516] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 24 February 1951, 61.

instruments active most of the time, and their fusion is thus often an undifferentiated, hectic blob of sound."[517]

Aside from this rare example of publicly expressed reservations, overall Berger was decidedly consistent in his praise and support of Milhaud's music. While this may be partially attributable to Berger's personal affection for Milhaud, and his gratitude for his support and guidance, it is notable that Berger's most substantial article on Milhaud was written in 1936, several years before they met. Furthermore, the criticism he lobbied at the music of his closest friends, and that of his most admired mentors, Copland and Stravinsky (see chapters 5 and 7), could at times be unrelenting.

What is clear is that, since his early days as a music critic, Berger had recognized Milhaud's significance as a not only talented and prolific but progressive composer, and one he saw as woefully and unjustifiably neglected. He then took upon himself and maintained to the end of his life the role of Milhaud's advocate, largely because he found that composer's pursuit of innovation—both in terms of his professional output and his personal attitude—to be genuine and thus praiseworthy.

Lack of Innovation: Barber

The innovative and the genuine were both essential to Berger. Given his view on the importance of the former, it comes as no surprise, then, that he struggled to come to terms with the work of Samuel Barber, whose sincerity he had never questioned. In one of his "Spotlight on the Moderns" columns for the *Saturday Review,* written in

[517] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review,* 24 February 1951, 61.

May 1951, Berger conceded that, "at forty-one [Barber] is in the company of our top American composers."[518] While acknowledging Barber's reputation, however, Berger was highly critical of his music, complaining that "Barber complacently accepts what may be called the conservatory style—the big noise, the fragmentary motive blown up and overworked, the uninstigated climax."[519]

Berger viewed Barber's style as antiquated, safe, and "unproblematic," as he put it. He wrote: "So polished a technique and such untroubled musicianship both innate and highly cultivated, cannot fail to elicit the admiration of the expert and the envy of fellow composers."[520] Clearly, professional polish was insufficient to create a satisfactory composition, in Berger's view, and while it may appear as a "source of strength," he suggested that it had also left the listener "wishing he would struggle more with the musical medium."[521] The implication was that Barber's music kept too much to the well-traveled paths of common-practice musical language, thereby posing insufficient challenge to either the composer or the listener.[522]

For a time, Berger saw potential for innovation in Barber. In a 1946 article, he remarked that "the avant garde opened its arms to Barber when his second symphony

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[518] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 26 May 1951, 62.

[519] Arthur Berger, "Scores and Records," *Modern Music* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1946): 66. The comment refers to Barber's First Symphony.

[520] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 26 May 1951, 62.

[521] Ibid., 62.

[522] A similar sentiment is expressed in Berger's review of Harold Shapero's Piano Sonata: "Composers use new materials not only to avoid a new Beethoven sonata, which would be just as great now as it would have been a century ago. They do so because they need some prop to rivet them to paths allowing for adventure and surprise in the internal relations, and to avoid being carried along by their own momentum." (*New York Herald Tribune*, 8 March 1949).

[…] was introduced. But the turbulent 'modernism' of this work is of an order that began to exhaust itself in the early thirties."[523] He found renewed promise in the *Capricorn Concerto*, in which Barber "adjust[s] to a really contemporary critical attitude":

> The chordal and instrumental sonorities are now more selective, the treatment is more compact. Barber realizes at last that the later nineteenth century models—those he formerly held so dear—are inspired not always because of their formal and textural devices, but often in spite of them.[524]

In the above-quoted column of May 1951, Berger still expressed hope that Barber's style would become more progressive. He commented that in his more recent works Barber appeared to have been expanding his musical language; thus, "[if we] take the long view, we get an encouraging impression of Barber's development."[525] Berger's hope was never realized. By 1954, he resumed his familiar criticism of Barber, dismissing his *Souvenirs*, for instance, as "an innocuous assortment of deliberately old-fashioned salon music."[526] Barber's style remained too conservative and safe to interest Berger further, and once he abandoned full-time criticism, he no longer felt obliged to feature Barber's music in his writings. It is particularly telling that Barber is not mentioned in *Reflections*.

Berger was especially dismayed by the enthusiastic reception Barber's music was receiving abroad, especially compared to the comparative neglect of most other

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[523] Arthur Berger, "Scores and Records," *Modern Music* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1946): 66.

[524] Ibid.

[525] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review,* 26 May 1951, 62.

[526] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Berg, Schoenberg, and Krasner," *Saturday Review,* 24 April 1954, 57.

American composers. In 1953, he noted: "Except for Samuel Barber, our composers are quite neglected in Europe in general."[527] Berger felt that due to its lack of innovation, the view of Barber's style as representative of contemporary American music presented a skewed picture of its trajectory. This apprehension comes through particularly clearly in Berger's comments on *Adagio for Strings*, a work he considered "well-made," but problematic, as it "is so much like the Prelude to Faure's *Pelleas et Melisande* and the home-spun English style that it is sad to contemplate how widely it represents American music abroad."[528]

Misguided Innovation: John Cage

As popular abroad as Barber was, perhaps the most internationally renowned mid-twentieth century American composer was John Cage, whose position as *de facto* ambassador of American modernism Berger similarly lamented, albeit for nearly opposite reasons. Having chided Barber for playing it safe, and suspecting Ives of hiding stylistic conservativism beneath a modernist veneer, Berger was even more critical of Cage's approach to innovation, which he saw as reckless and misguided, though he did not seem to have doubted its sincerity.

Berger's relationship with Cage, as with Milhaud, was personal as well as professional. He worked with both of them at Mills College, but the similarity ends there. Berger met Cage in 1937 and they forged a friendship that would last through the mid-1940s, when, as Berger recalled, Cage came to visit him and exclaimed: '"I

[527] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on Moderns: More Villa-Lobos," *Saturday Review*, 26 September 1953, 78.

[528] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 24 February 1951, 61.

won't have anything to do with a neoclassicist'. He walked down the hall and turned to me […] and said […] we no longer can be friends."[529] Shortly after, Berger recalled, Cage publicly stated that he was not interested in Berger's piece *Ideas of Order*. Cage's motivation to end the friendship may have been more complex than his professed distaste for neoclassicists. It was likely more personal, related to Berger's writings on Cage and his view of Cage's music. The end of the relationship troubled Berger. Even as late as 1988 he stated in an interview: "It's a shame because I did like John. I wish we could have remained friends, […] and I hope maybe […] we'll be able to renew our friendship."[530]

At Mills College, before their schism, Berger witnessed some of Cage's collaborative work with Lou Harrison, and concluded that there appeared to have been a rich exchange of ideas between the artists. In *Reflections*, he recalls: "My impression at the time was that they came up with the far-out ideas together. It would seem that Cage was the one with the missionary zeal and posture to become a celebrity on the basis of them."[531] This remark, made as it was close to the end of his life, suggests that Berger harbored a certain admiration for Cage's accomplishments despite his misgivings about their musical results.

Berger also recalled that at one point, Cage and Harrison invited him to collaborate with them: "I still have a letter that John wrote in the middle of the forties,

[529] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[530] Ibid.

[531] *Reflections*, 104.

urging my wife to tell me to join his percussion movement."[532] A letter, dated 21 March 1942, contains a request for Berger to compose a percussion work for a concert that Cage was hosting at Bennington College in Vermont. He wrote: "It would be very vitalizing to the 'percussion movement' to have a new American […] score by Berger."[533] The request remained unfulfilled; the piece never written.

In addition to their brief personal association, Berger's compositional output reveals at least one type of influence from Cage: both his *Three Pieces for Two Pianos* (1961) and *Five Pieces for Piano* (1968) call for a prepared piano. In a program note for the earlier work, he directed attention to this connection: "I should express my thanks to John Cage for his 'prepared-piano' pieces, which gave me the idea that a sparing use of 'prepared-piano' sounds could pepper the music with percussion without bringing in an extra player."[534] In a 1988 interview, Berger recalled *New York Times* critic John Rockwell responding to his use of the prepared piano with the question: "What is this old academic doing with this stuff?" Berger quipped, with a reference to having known Cage in the forties: "He [didn't] realize that I was in on the beginning of this."[535]

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[532] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[533] Letter from John Cage to Arthur and Esther Berger, 21 March 1942, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[534] Arthur Berger, "Program Notes" for LP recording of *Three Pieces for Two Pianos*, COLUMBIA MS-6959, 1967. Berger at one point said he took his inspiration for the *Three Pieces of Two Piano* from Béla Bartók's *Music for Two Pianos and Percussion*, and he used the prepared piano to create the percussive sounds. Composers other than Cage and Bartók had also used prepared piano by the time Berger did, of course, and he might have been influenced by them as well. See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[535] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. While Rockwell's comments are undated, it can be supposed that the conversation occurred in the 1960s or early 1970s, when the works in

Despite such fondly recalled anecdotes, Berger's critical disenchantment with Cage's iconoclastic ways transcended personal history. Well before composing for it himself, Berger criticized Cage's use of prepared piano—not the instrument itself, but his approach to writing for it, which he deemed to be ineffective. The opening passage of a 1951 "Spotlight on the Moderns" column in the *Saturday Review* reads:

> John Cage's "prepared piano" is in a way, a first cousin, a chic snobbish cousin, to the one-man band we occasionally encounter at street corners or carnivals. […] Having arrived this far, Cage does little more to exploit the new resources than his poor relation who tinkles the bells on his head-dress and claps the cymbals on his legs simply by strutting up and down.[536]

Berger's critique was aimed specifically at Cage's iconic *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1948), which he sees as full of missed opportunities:

> Cage relies on unconventional sonority as a disguise for what is either ineptitude in technique and invention or perverse negation of compositional problems. Where there is structure, it is that of a first-grade teaching piece or exercise played haltingly, and it is sad to see a few striking ideas go uncomposed. […] The music proceeds in starts and stops, and I can only recommend the lugubrious cumulative effect as a cure for insomniacs.[537]

Realizing he might be accused of standing against innovation and progress—which, as we have seen, he ardently supported as fundamental to all serious music—and that the accusation would both negate the power of his argument and play into the emerging Cage mythology, he then offered the following disclaimer:

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question were fairly recent, while Berger's career was at a point when it would not have been a stretch for him to be perceived as an "old academic."

[536] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*. 21 January 1952, 42.

[537] Ibid.

> [I am] alarmed at the risk of these remarks, for nothing is so reassuring to a self-styled prophet and his coterie as critical disapproval. But trust me, dear reader, when I say I am no stranger or enemy to progress. The titillation of novel effects wears off when there is so little to support them.[538]

Indeed, Berger's own later works for prepared piano, in which the preparation is used sparingly as a timbral detail, may have been in themselves an act of critique, his scores "correcting" Cage's overuse, as he perceived it, of an admittedly good effect.

Berger criticism accompanied Cage beyond the prepared-piano phase of his career. For instance, in his 1951 review of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* for twelve radios, the critic expressed both bemusement and embarrassment:

> It would be nice to report a sensation or a side-splitting joke. If anything was amusing it was merely the sight of Mr. Cage earnestly conducting an ensemble of some of our finest musicians in a series of embarrassing silences and, at best, the shreds of broadcasts you get at home when you turn the dial rapidly.[539]

Two years later, in a scathing review of Cage's *String Quartet*, Berger takes aim at both its composer's philosophy and his music:

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[538] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns," *Saturday Review*, 26 January 1952, 42. This review apparently caused Cage great distress. Berger's version of Cage's reaction to the "one-man band" statement is dramatic indeed: "He went in tears to Virgil Thomson and said, 'Look what my friend, Arthur Berger has done to me.' And Virgil said, 'This is marvelous. This is practically a slogan for a whole movement.'" Cage certainly did not see the humor in Berger's words, and the incident did little to mend their already fragile friendship. See draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[539] Arthur Berger, "New Music Society: *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* for 12 Radios Heard," *New York Herald Tribune*, [probably about 3 May], 1951.

> His readings in Oriental philosophy have led him to an interest in the concept of tranquility, which manifests itself in his music, I am afraid, in the form of boredom. One unbearably long movement is superciliously marked, "nearly stationary." With the stuffiness of the academician but none of the craftsmanship, Cage places unbelievably leaden and static sounds in succession with an infallible capacity to achieve the ugliest timbres and the most neutral connections. It comes nearer than anything I know to the sort of a parody of modern music that might be improvised as a parlor trick or vaudeville act, but the pretentious spirit in which it is carried off renders it far from amusing where Cage is concerned.[540]

Eventually, Berger acknowledged, and at times even celebrated, Cage's mission as an innovator. He came to believe, however, that "Cage's contribution to twentieth-century culture is more significant for the other arts than for music."[541] He therefore differentiated between Cage's works he accepted as "music" and those he felt fell outside of that definition. For such compositions, he used the terms "non-music," as well as "fringe 'music,'" and "Sound Art."[542]

Even in his assessment of the former group, however, Berger found much of Cage's work to be detrimental to the development of modern music. This held particularly true when he saw his ideas and techniques exerting an influence on other composers and performers. For instance, he complained that in "replicating the tactics of Cage without being aware of it, [performers] have tried all sorts of gimmicks to liven up a concert."[543] As mentioned above, he also expressed anxiety regarding Cage's worldwide presence and his position as a representative of American music,

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[540] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on Americans," *Saturday Review*, 28 February 1953, 75.

[541] *Reflections*, 102.

[542] Ibid., 117.

[543] Ibid., 42.

writing: "Cage, of course, with his theories of 'non-music' acquired a reputation in Europe and Asia wider than any other American composer, with the possible exception of George Gershwin."[544] Despite his worries, however, Berger remained convinced that Cage posed ultimately no threat to what he called the "essential musical tradition"; they could coexist peacefully side by side:

> John Cage came along in the forties to turn things so completely upside down. Some rejoiced and were ready to declare it the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. But to the great relief of many of us Cage admitted that what he was talking about was 'nonmusic' and 'nonart.' Though he had a great influence over the essential musical tradition we can rejoice in the knowledge that he left it intact.[545]

Overall, Berger appears to have been ambivalent about the enigma of Cage, equally interested in, threatened by, and dismissive of his creative endeavors. He also wondered, justifiably or not, whether his own relationship with Cage may have contributed to the Cage phenomenon. In 1988, he quipped: "I would like someone to do some research on my relation to Cage, because I have the grandiose notion that I created Cage." More than a little tongue-in-cheek, he elaborated:

> I created this monster, because every time I said something, he would assume it was academic and not do it, [a]nd if I said anything was wrong, he would assume that he should do it. And so he became successful in everything I said was wrong.[546]

While Berger meant this statement in jest, it reveals an undercurrent of impatience with Cage. At times he was aggravated by Cage's role as a contrarian, and by his blatant attempts to dismantle tradition and establish himself on top of its ruins as an

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[544] *Reflections*, 34.

[545] Ibid., 107–8.

[546] Draft of OHAM interview, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

iconoclast. It is the extent to which Cage strayed from Berger's aesthetic that caused his discomfort with Cage's brand of innovation.

Conclusion

In his own career as a composer, Berger felt driven to continuously expand and develop his musical language. These aesthetics of innovation and progress colored his attitude toward other composers and his view of their works, as expressed in his criticism. Berger's often uncompromising position and his willingness to state it publicly rendered mixed results with respect to both his personal and professional lives. Personally, it damaged his friendship with Cage and thwarted a potential relationship with Ives. But for the reader, Berger's critical consistency reveals what he valued most in music, and encapsulates the persona of an important American journalist.

Chapter 7: Neoclassicism, Stravinsky, and the Stravinsky School

As a composer, Berger has been most often classified as a "neoclassicist," a label that he freely accepted, and which he did not see as precluding either innovation or personal development. It is unsurprising therefore that throughout his career as a writer and critic he was much concerned with the definition, compositional principles, and reception of the neoclassical style, as exhibited in the works of Stravinsky, his European contemporaries, and his American followers, especially those who, like himself, had studied with Nadia Boulanger. In light of his own stylistic evolution as a composer, Berger was remarkably consistent throughout his career in the view of neoclassicism he presented in his writings. Notably, several aspects of his assessment of Stravinsky were challenged by the latter's own portrayal of himself. Berger's determination to defend two contradictory positions simultaneously exemplifies both his certainty in his own convictions and the degree of identification he felt with the older composer.

It is clear from Berger's consistency regarding neoclassicism that, despite his and Stravinsky's personal choices, he always considered it a potentially viable approach to worthwhile composition. The opening portion of this chapter outlines Berger's understanding of the term "neoclassical" and the style that it defines, particularly as compared to so-called neoromanticism. This will be followed by a discussion of his writings on Stravinsky's music (with the exception of his theories on octatonicism; see chapter 8) and his thoughts on the phenomenon of the American "Stravinsky School," to which he is often linked, as well as his criticism of other composers associated with the group.

Neoclassicism: A Concept and a Style

Berger broadly defined neoclassicism as a constructive, innovative, and essentially "modernist movement in which certain tension is provoked between the past and the present."[547] Beyond the difficulties inherent in discussing any abstract idea, particularly an "ism," Berger found the term "neoclassicism" highly problematic and burdened with negative connotations and improper assumptions on the part of various observers. Among other things, Berger found worrisome a condescending attitude expressed by some critics and fellow composers, especially the serialists, to any piece labeled neoclassical.[548] He believed that their assertion of intellectual superiority towards what they believed to be pandering to the masses denied neoclassical music appropriate respect and inhibited its study and reception.[549]

Most importantly, Berger argued that negative connotations associated with the term "neoclassical" inhibited a listener's unbiased appreciation of a new composition labeled as such. Drawing an interesting parallel between the reception of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, he wrote:

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[547] *Reflections*, 78.

[548] With the exception of Cage (see chapter 6), Berger did not identify the composers by name, but did name at least one critic, stating that he was particularly displeased with the writings of *New York Times*'s Olin Downes. Editor Minna Lederman wrote Berger a letter admonishing him for focusing too much on neoclassicism in his 1947 article "Music for Ballet" (*The Dance Inde*x). She wrote: "Forget Downes, et al, they don't count in this piece or ever." Furthermore, in 1998 Berger recalled: "In the 1940s and '50s, the powerful *New York Times* critic Olin Downes did everything he could to banish what he considered the cold, calculating neoclassic music of Stravinsky." See letter from Minna Lederman to Arthur Berger, n.d., Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL and Arthur Berger, "Octatonic-Harvard Lecture," TMs, 1998, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[549] *Reflections*, 71.

> It is one of the unfortunate quirks of history that so great a part of Stravinsky's oeuvre should have been saddled with a label like "neoclassicism" that does it so much injustice. Schoenberg seems to have been the victim of a comparable injustice because of the locution "atonality" which he disapproved of, since, it suggested "against tone," though it does not affect, imprison our hearing to the extent that "neoclassicism" does.[550]

Inventing a new label would not solve these problems, in his opinion:

> Calling a movement something else when one designation is so deeply imprinted on the minds of so many people is, it seems to me, cumbersome. The best we can do is apply first aid and try to do some damage control.[551]

Instead, it became somewhat of a mission for him to rehabilitate the term, both in the eyes of the general public, and perhaps even more importantly, fellow artists. Indeed, he claimed himself to be "a voluble spokesman for 'save neoclassicism' (i.e. Stravinsky and his firmament), though it may be hard to believe now how much reason there was for concern over the danger of [its] extinction."[552]

Berger long took issue with the common belief that, unlike neoclassical composers, neoromantics were the ones who offered their audience a full gamut of emotional expression. To the contrary, he opined in *Reflections*: the range of emotion in Romantic music was quite narrow, limited to "amorous exaltation, intense longing (sehnsucht), profoundest mourning, agitation, ecstasy and such."[553] He questioned the reason why a wide variety of other emotions were left off their expressive pallet—emotions such as coldness. Cold, he argued, is a real feeling, and not necessarily one

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[550] *Reflections*, 50–51.

[551] Ibid., 51.

[552] Berger, "Roger Sessions: A Reminiscence," 117. The sentence structure and context indicate that Berger refers to the extinction of the neoclassical style itself, rather than simply the extinction of the term.

[553] *Reflections*, 56.

with pejorative connotations, yet "when a piece of music is cold we say it lacks feeling."[554] He had thought along the same lines more than sixty years earlier, when as a master's student, he stated in his thesis that "in order to be completely 'original' at every moment, […] the Romantic must reiterate the small contribution of a unique mode of expression—confined to comparatively few moods—that every artist inevitably makes." In contrast, Berger claimed that the Classicist expressed emotion by "consciously relating themes, inverting them, combining them, contrasting them." The relationship and manipulation of multiple, contrasting musical ideas ensured that multiple emotions were expressed, including those outside the clichés used by the Romantics. This was not to say that such expression was deliberate or consciously pre-planned by the composer, or should be:

> [The composer] is not simply expressing emotions—for this […] would narrow down the emotional aspect—he is *relating* them. Thus, in order to have a relation, there is an assurance that there will be more than one emotion. […] In the process of relating them, new impulses and deeply concealed emotions express themselves in the choice, in the manner of the juxtaposition, in the accidental slip of the hand. […] The musical emotions are fully experienced when all the relationships of a composition have been apprehended, for they exist nowhere else but in these relationships.[555]

The "slip of the hand" was a potent possibility for Berger: elsewhere in his thesis, he speculated that the creation of emotion in the music of a neoclassical composer may be explained by using Freudian psychoanalysis. Specifically, he suggested that both the musical content and a resulting emotion may "spring from the innermost recesses

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[554] *Reflections*, 57.

[555] Arthur Berger, "A Justification of the Classical Revival as Exemplified in the Works of Igor Stravinsky," Master's Thesis, Harvard University, [unpublished draft, circa 1935–36], Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

of his being […] of which he may be scarcely conscious," and if that is so, a composer "would inhibit their expression if he consciously sought the emotion before he set about to express it."[556]

Much later, Berger continued using the "Classic vs Romantic" contrast as a framework for discussing what he saw as the false dichotomy of form vs emotion:

> The paradigm of the Romantic composer has him or her, in the process of creation, starting with an emotion and subsequently looking for notes to express it. […] By contrast, the Classicist starts with the tones, and only then the emotion, according to the nature of music, comes in their wake.[557]

Furthermore:

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[556] Berger, "A Justification of the Classical Revival as Exemplified in the Works of Igor Stravinsky." This idea is related to Berger's theory of psychic automatism, which for a time underlined his own work as a composer. Although Berger's engagement with psychic automatism is most revealing in his post-neoclassical works, its roots stem from the formalist view that "form is feeling." He was introduced to both ideas during his time at Harvard, primarily by one of his teachers, philosopher David Prall, and his close friends, visual artist Robert Motherwell and poet Delmore Schwartz. Psychic automatism is defined by André Breton in the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924: "psychic automatism in its pure state" is a technique, "by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. [It is] dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern." (André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Anne Arbor: University of Michigan, 1969), 26.) Berger stated that within the confines of music composition, the process of psychic automatism "has much to do with a sense that one discovers more *within* the act of creation than out of it." He continues: "'Psychic automatism' is not a mere reflex motor response, nor is it unconscious or barely conscious dispensation of skills acquired through years of training so that it becomes quite mechanical to go through the motions of driving a car or putting the thumb under in executing a scale at the piano. Technical skills are, of course, prerequisite. They enable you to achieve the results you conceive. But you must be careful not to end up with mere pyrotechnical display. [. . .] The mission is one of discovery, though as Motherwell once put it, you may begin with nothing more than 'doodling.'" Berger was also careful to note that the chance music of John Cage was not an example of psychic automatism, as the primary requirement of the latter is the composer's skill and most importantly, his control over the material. See and Arthur Berger Interview with Ross Bauer in *Musically Incorrect*, 50.

[557] *Reflections*, 56.

> When the conscious mind is engaged mainly in arranging tones in suitable and striking configurations, the feelings that inform them are likely to spring from deep sources the subtle ramifications of which would be far too elusive to grasp in any other way. Yet, by the notes chosen, even under the strictest formal constraints, these deep sequestered feelings become somehow accessible.[558]

Thus, to a classicist, emotion arises out of form and formal contrasts:

> Classical composers felt that emotion did not always have to be at great heights or depths to be vivid and meaningful. Moreover they realized the potentiality of form to embody and unify contrasting emotions. The composer's primary concern was to bring to bear the appropriate technical requirements for their proper expression—not as two different things, for they were aware of them as two aspects of the same things.[559]

Berger also acknowledged the difficulty of translating the emotional content of a piece of music into verbal explanations. Indeed, he argued that such a thing may well be impossible:

> If the emotion seems ambiguous, seems to elude us when we try to encapsulate it, it is not because it is in itself ambiguous or elusive. The emotion expressed, as I have said, is perfectly specific. If we lean too heavily on verbal characterization we may make the mistake of concluding that where emotions are least definable they are absent altogether.[560]

Despite the fervency expressed in the quotes above, Berger was ever wary of the dangers of oversimplification, and particularly of the problematic labeling of modern composers as either Classic or Romantic. He wrote: "I wonder if it would not be a good idea to reserve the rubrics Classical and Romantic to apply to the artwork rather than to the artist, who may be different things at different times."[561] But

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[558] *Reflections*, 57.

[559] Ibid.

[560] Ibid., 6.

[561] Ibid., 53.

ultimately, as both a composer and a critic, Berger asserted his own allegiance to neoclassical music. He lamented that in a world full of passive listeners (critics included), the music of the Romantics, with its banal emotional associations, was easier to listen to and therefore more popular, while neoclassicism, although—and because—it presented a challenge, was ultimately a more satisfying experience.[562]

Stravinsky and Neoclassicism

Berger's writings on neoclassicism were frequently couched in terms of Stravinsky's neoclassical output.[563] The public perception that neoclassical music was supposedly devoid of feeling especially bedeviled Berger with regard to his Stravinsky advocacy, since it was precipitated in part by Stravinsky's own frequently cited remarks. In his 1935 autobiography, the composer wrote: "I consider music by its essence powerless to express anything whatsoever: a sentiment, an attitude, a psychological state, a phenomenon of nature. […] Expression has never been an immanent property of music."[564] One of the first published discussions of the subject appeared in Berger's review of the French-language version of *Poetics of Music*, Stravinsky's influential

[562] Arthur Berger, "A Justification of the Classical Revival as Exemplified in the Works of Igor Stravinsky."

[563] As mentioned in the Introduction to the present dissertation, Berger studied both Stravinsky's music and his writings intensively with Boulanger, and had already written his master's thesis on Stravinsky when their association began. Therefore, he might have formed his later views not only in the context of what he absorbed from Boulanger, but as a result of discussing with her and receiving her feedback on his previously developed ideas.

[564] Quoted in *Reflections*, 54; Berger notes in the text that the translation is his own. Berger's command of French appears to have been such that he was able to engage directly with Stravinsky's writings in that language. For the original statement, see Igor Stravinsky, *Chroniques de ma vie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Denoel and Steele, 1935), 116.

set of six Norton lectures, published in book format in 1942.[565] In the review, Berger declared that although Stravinsky's earlier remark had "enraged critics," "[t]hese lectures will cause less indignation, since they are concerned not so much with what Stravinsky feels music cannot do as with what all will agree it can do: namely, embody a form." Berger proceeded to argue at length that some type of emotional expression in a musical work is inevitable, given that music is an embodiment of a coherent thought process:

> Stravinsky's attitude toward content, even as reflected in his most extreme pronouncements, seems more justifiable if viewed as a working principle of this first musician of our time, rather than as a philosopher's carefully balanced theory. He may consciously deny the emotional aspect of his work. But […] modern exploration of the unconscious offers proof that we express feelings without being immediately aware of them. Stravinsky is right, as a composer, to concern himself with the "order and discipline" of the work to be done. […] The embodiment of emotion is not precluded by his conscious effort. The identification of form and feeling in contemporary esthetics makes it clear that the notes which he, in the creative process, may discard as a trite formal solution may be precisely what someone else, viewing the organized tones from another aspect, may discard as a sentimental bit. [Stravinsky] is not driven by inspiration to his work table, but he drives himself to work, and "subsequently there is born this emotive disturbance." The allusion here may be merely to the composer's emotion in the creative act. But it is in much the same way that musical emotions follow in the wake of tonal patterns.[566]

Almost sixty years later in *Reflections*, Berger maintained this line of argument:

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[565] Arthur Berger, "Stravinsky at Harvard," *New Republic*, 14 December 1942: 800–801 and Igor Stravinsky, *Poétique Musicale: Sous Forme de Six Leçons, par Igor Stravinsky* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942). Berger specifies that he is reviewing the French version. The English translation was not available until 1947.

[566] Berger, "Stravinsky at Harvard," 801.

> Composers may evoke emotions without knowing what they are and without being aware they are doing so. Tones themselves are, to start with, emotionally toned. […] A composer's choice of a high sound to complete a formal pattern involves an accompanying, probably unconscious, approval of the feeling that comes in its wake. It is a feeling, moreover, that is not a mere matter of association like the relation of most words to their object. If the listener can resist assimilating the sound to anything obvious in the outside world, its function and meaning will be precisely what they are by virtue of its place within the music's structure.[567]

As both composer and critic, Berger found it difficult, especially early in his career, to come to terms with Stravinsky's statements, particularly as he had derived his understanding of neoclassicism largely from the latter's music. In his writings on the subject, he referenced Stravinsky's remarks on music and emotion frequently, but would either gloss over the ideas expressed therein or attempt to reframe them to sound less damning in the context of his own aesthetic outlook. In his 1971 article "Neoclassicism Reexamined," for instance, he declared that Stravinsky's claim "is constantly refuted by his music if we try to verify it there."[568] In his attempts to do so, Berger referenced Stravinsky's use of rhythm: "Feeling is nonetheless present in his music. In fact, through rhythm in particular. […] By his musical rhythm, which is unsurpassed in its ingenuity and force, Stravinsky distills emotional essences that evade others."[569] He also believed that larger-scale structure in Stravinsky's music could embody emotional content:

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[567] *Reflections*, 55.

[568] Arthur Berger, "Neoclassicism Reexamined," *Perspectives of New Music* 9, no. 2 (1971): 83.

[569] Arthur Berger, "Music for the Ballet," *Dance Index* (Fall 1947), 259. This article was reprinted in *Stravinsky in the Theater*, ed. by Minna Lederman (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 1949), 121–22, in turn reprinted by Da Capo Press, 1979.

> To be a neoclassic composer is not simply to parrot the eighteenth-century Classicists but to apply structural principles in composing—that is, modern structural principles that would serve some of the same purposes as the principles in Classical music. The first of the three parts of [*Symphony of*] *Psalms* employs strategies in their own way analogous to those [of the Classical era] in the matter of delayed and frustrated resolutions within a context that may no longer be legitimately defined as functionally tonal. […] With regard to what his critics and Stravinsky himself have to say about the absence of feeling in his music, there can be no more eloquent disclaimer than parts 1 and 2 of *Psalms*. Thus, on some level—it was undoubtedly unconscious—Stravinsky felt there must be an element of affinity between the sense of pleading for C minor and individuals beseeching God to lend them his ear. […] And also, in part 2, something loosely parallel to the satisfaction of arrival at the thwarted C minor in the words "Expectans expectavi DOMINUM, et intendit mihi..." (Waiting for the *Lord*, he reached out to me) [emphasis in the original].[570]

Berger was particularly gratified to have later found another, more nuanced statement by Stravinsky on music and expression, which lent support to his own view. He quoted the statement at length in *Reflections*, confessing to have been "enormously relieved when [Stravinsky] explained himself many years later—or as some may prefer to put it, reversed himself":

> It was aimed against the notion that a piece of music is in reality a transcendental idea 'expressed in terms of music,' with the reductio ad absurdum implication that exact sets of correlatives must exist between a composer's feelings and his notation. It was offhand and annoyingly incomplete, but even the stupidest of critics could have seen that it did not deny musical expressivity, but only the validity of a type of verbal statement about musical expressivity. I stand by the remark, incidentally, though today I would put it the other way around: music expresses itself.[571]

Another of Berger's chief concerns with respect to the critical reception of Stravinsky was a commonly held belief that his music was retrogressive. In

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[570] *Reflections*, 62–66.

[571] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 101; quoted in *Reflections*, 54.

"Neoclassicism Reexamined," Berger quoted from a 1927 essay, "Avertissement par Igor Stravinsky," the title which has been translated as "A *Warning* by Igor Stravinsky":

> There is much talk nowadays of a reversion to classicism, and works believed to have been composed under the influences of so-called classical models are labeled neo-classic. […] The use of such devices is insufficient to constitute the real neo-classicism, for classicism itself was characterized not in the least by its technical processes, which, then as now, were themselves subject to modification from period to period, but rather by its constructive values.[572]

Like Stravinsky, Berger took issue with the perception that neoclassical music, Stravinsky's included, was characterized by an outright borrowing of classical forms. He accused the critics who perpetuated this assumption of giving neoclassical music "bad press," with "its products treated as hand-me-downs, not even acceptable as something recycled." Guided by such criticism, the audiences as a result came to see these works as a bastardization of the masters, and consequently preferred listening to the "untouched" classics.[573]

In both his critical writings and in *Reflections*, Berger vehemently disputed the view of Stravinsky's neoclassical music as lacking originality. He saw such criticism as inappropriate and unfair complaints heaped upon him by fellow composers, "who

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[572] Berger "Neoclassicism Reexamined," 82. A similar discussion is present in "A Justification of the Classical Revival as Exemplified in the Works of Igor Stravinsky*."* The quote is from Igor Stravinsky, "Avertissement," *The Dominant* [London], December, 1927, 13–14. It seems that this English version, aside from the French title, is what was printed in *The Dominant*; the same text is quoted in other sources, such as Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 578.

[573] Berger, "Neoclassicism Reexamined," 79.

did not recognize his own achievement as being original in the sense that they considered their own to be."[574]

Berger asserted that no composer who lacked individuality and originality could have had such a strong influence over others.[575] He also posited that all composers borrowed from the past, and referred frequently to Pablo Picasso's definition of artists as "receptacles," who "must pick out what is good for [them] when [they] find it."[576] Instead of merely copying from "the old," Berger points out that it is the re-application, adaptation, and transformation of the borrowed idea, form, or gesture that constitutes the essence of neoclassical style, in the same way images from life are distorted and transformed in Picasso's cubist paintings.[577]

An illustration of Berger's thinking is his approach to Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, a work often cited as having inaugurated that composer's neoclassical period. Berger disagreed, arguing that in that ballet, Stravinsky was merely imitating the style of the early 18th century instead of using it as a springboard for his own ideas. With his customary dry humor, Berger quipped:

> I recommend special vigilance where one believes one has espied a case of neoclassicism but on closer inspection it turns out to be an excursion to an old style in the spirit of a vacation trip from which one will soon return.[578]

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[574] Berger, "Neoclassicism Reexamined," 79. Berger does not specify which composers might have been responsible for the complaints he references.

[575] *Reflections*, 70.

[576] Quoted from Pablo Picasso, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, edited by Dore Ashton (New York, Penguin Books, 1977), 51.

[577] *Reflections*, 75.

[578] Ibid., 51.

In defense of Stravinsky's originality, Berger argued that his style was distinct from those of other composers associated with neoclassicism (he names specifically Hindemith and Prokofiev). He identified as uniquely Stravinskian a long list of musical characteristics, such as "the interrupted line, the jagged shapes, the precipitous cutting, the dissonance, the hiccups, the asymmetry of rhythm, [and] the skeletal textures." He also noted Stravinsky's unique orchestration, the wide spacing of chords and the uncharacteristic pitch doublings he used, as well as the addition of a non-chord tone that would alter the traditional triad just enough to unsettle tonal structure.[579] This was more than window-dressing:

> Being sensitive to the precise quality of the chords is only one of the requirements for hearing what is essential in neoclassic Stravinsky. There is the matter of pitch organization which, because it is often diatonic and may have a pitch priority analogous to the traditional tonic, lends itself to relaxed listening in which one might fancy one hears tonality though the music is essentially nontonal.[580]

Berger and other like-minded critics also battled against the perception that Stravinsky was supposedly "enigmatic, unnatural, arbitrary." In response to such notions, Berger asserted, "we insisted on the *logic* of his development."[581] In order to elucidate the logical development of Stravinsky's neoclassical style, Berger traced the composer's official move to neoclassicism to his 1923 *Octour* (as mentioned above, he did not consider *Pulcinella* neoclassical). Although the critic felt that "this approach to feeling through gesture or tonal patterns indicates that innate classicism

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[579] *Reflections*, 75–76.

[580] Ibid., 81.

[581] Berger, "Neoclassicism Reexamined," 79–80.

was there from the start," he identified the stylistic change as "part of a trend that originated with Satie, […] precipitated in Stravinsky's case as a reaction to his own complexity in the *Rite* and anticipated by the international character of *Histoire du Soldat* […] with its dance number in the manner of a Baroque Suite."[582]

In a 1947 article "Music for the Ballet" published in the *Dance Index*, Berger argued that neoclassical ideology had also been present in *Les Noces* and even as far back as *Petrouchka*, stating that in Stravinsky's "handling of folk material it was the plastic possibility that interested him much more than the evocative power," and that while these ballets are not neoclassical per se, "their general principles are the same."[583] He maintained that in part it was writing for ballet that directed Stravinsky towards neoclassicism, stating:

> Stravinsky seems always to have understood that the effort needed to perceive action, décor and music simultaneously can be greatly lightened by reducing density in the sound. And in still another important way the ballet has been decisive to his classicism, by stimulating the tendency to model musical patterns on bodily motion.[584]

Berger also believed that ballet was an appropriately neoclassical genre because of the similarities in the general principles that governed both ballet and classicism, which he identified as the "emphasis on line and the organic inter-relation of parts."[585] Specifically, he asserted that elements of gesture and phrasing present in

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[582] Arthur Berger, draft of an unidentified lecture, n.d., Arthur Berger Papers, *NYPL*, and *Reflections*, 69.

[583] Arthur Berger, "Music for the Ballet," *Dance Index* (Fall 1947), 260.

[584] Ibid., 258. The style guide of the *Dance Index* used the French spelling, "Strawinsky" in its text.

[585] Berger, "Music for the Ballet," *Dance Index*, 260. Berger is discussing only the musical style in this article. He does not touch upon Bronislava Nijinska's choreography of *Les Noces*, which was indeed neoclassical in style. Dance historian Lynn Garafola notes that in *Les Noces*, Nijinska was attempting to modernize "the system of classical movement." She writes, "*Les Noces* […] was the first

classical ballet, as well as the highly rhythmic ostinato passages, contributed to the development of Stravinsky's mature neoclassical style, as they in part dictated the form of a piece. Berger considered Stravinsky's approach more appropriate for the genre of ballet than the Romantic style:

> Stravinsky's music is designed to set asymmetries in relief, where romantic music does not. In romantic music, the device of rubato […] allows retards at the performer's whim. But Stravinsky's beat is metronomic.[586]

Berger further contended that the rhythmic intensity of Stravinsky's ballet scores is an example of form directing emotion, stating: "By his musical rhythm, which is unsurpassed in its ingenuity and force, Stravinsky distils emotional essences that evade others who seek to grasp them in their diffuse state."[587]

Berger's consistent attention to and fervent defense of Stravinsky's neoclassical works is notable on two fronts. As a critic and a supporter of modernist composition, he participated in establishing Stravinsky's place as a giant of contemporary music equal in stature to the idols of the post-war serialists, Schoenberg and Webern. As a composer, he was, albeit in a roundabout way, defending himself, as an acknowledged Stravinsky follower and a card-carrying member of the so-called Boston Stravinsky School.

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ballet created for the Diaghilev company in which the entire female ensemble donned ballerina footwear. Nijinska stressed the percussive rather than the aerial qualities of pointe, an approach that broke with nineteenth century conventions." See Lynn Garafola, *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 197; 186.

[586] Berger, "Music for the Ballet," 263. Berger seems not to have been aware that within the Romantic ballet genre of the nineteenth century, set dance pieces were rhythmically and metrically regular, even more so than Stravinsky's.

[587] Ibid., 259.

Stravinsky School

The earliest known appearance in print of the term "Stravinsky School" is found in Aaron Copland's 1949 essay "Influence, Problem, Tone," first published in a collection titled *Stravinsky in the Theater*. Copland wrote: "Among our younger generation it is easy to discover a Stravinsky School: Shapero, Haieff, Berger, Lessard, Foss, and Fine."[588] Copland contended that the American Stravinsky School "arose out of Stravinsky's move towards neo-classicism," but otherwise declined to specify any particular characteristics of the school, or any criteria for being counted as its member.[589] Indeed, in his 1955 article "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," Berger expanded Copland's proposed membership list to include Ingolf Dahl, Charles Jones, Paul Des Marais, Leo Smit, and Louise Talma.[590] Irving Fine identified the group as "a later group of neo-classicists," and noted the lesser, but still significant influence of Hindemith on their music.[591] Virgil Thomson stated that the members of the school composed in an "international neoclassic manner

[588] Aaron Copland, "Influence, Problem, Tone," reprint in *Stravinsky in the Theater*, ed. by Minna Lederman (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), 121–22. Collection originally published by Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 1949. Article originally printed in *Dance Index* 6 (1949), 249.

[589] Aaron Copland, "Influence, Problem, Tone," 121.

[590] Arthur Berger, "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," in Gilbert Chase, ed. *The American Composer Speaks* (n.p.: Louisiana State Press, 1966), 203. Originally printed in *The Score and I.M.A. Magazine* 12 (1955): 38–46.

[591] Phillip Ramey, *Irving Fine: An American Composer in His Time* (Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2005), 49.

(fountainhead Stravinsky)."[592] Harold Shapero referred to the group, himself included, as "second-rate Stravinskys—just offshoots of the big man."[593]

Some issues that complicated a stable definition of the school were, first, the fact that "Stravinsky's neoclassicism" was too broad an area to constitute a model; and second, that the composers named wrote in distinct styles of their own, although all at one time championed neoclassicism and were admirers of Stravinsky's music. As stylistic descriptors, scholars and critics used the terms such as "Stravinskian" or "in the manner of Stravinsky," thus pointing to an influence of Stravinsky as a common denominator for the music composed by the group.[594] Despite discrepancies among other writers, Berger consistently defined the Stravinsky School as a group of like-minded composers that emerged around the beginning of the Second World War, prior to Copland's formal identification of it. "We had no name," Berger wrote, "but we were variously referred to as 'The New Boston Classical School,' 'The Harvard Neo-Classicists,' or simply, the 'New England School.'"[595] In all his references to the

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[592] *A Virgil Thomson Reader,* 304.

[593] Ramey, 49. From context it is clear that Shapero intended to include himself in this apparent condemnation. He was known in general to be self-deprecating, and in my conversations with him, he expressed surprisingly little regard for his own achievements.

[594] "In the manner of Stravinsky" can be found in the entry on Arthur Berger, and the descriptor "Stravinskian" in that on Irving Fine in Neil Butterworth, *Dictionary of American Classical Composers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004). The term "Stravinskian" is also used in the entry on Berger in the 1954 edition of the Grove: see Peggy Glanville-Hicks, "Arthur Berger," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* 5th edition, edited by Eric Blom, vol. 1 (London**:** McMillian, 1954**)**, 640. Critics used the term "Stravinskian" as well; see, for instance, Derrick Henry, "Siegel Presents Recital at Piano," *The New York Times*, 14 March 1949; R.S., "New Music: Piano Music by Americans Reveals Diversity of Idioms," *Musical America,* June 1948; Klaus George Roy, "Music of Our Century," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1955; and Virgil Thompson, "Music," *New York Herald Tribune,* 23 October 1949.

[595] *Reflections,* 69.

School, Berger always included himself, Fine, and Shapero as its pivotal members, and even suggested that he himself was responsible for the composers' association with one another:

> It may be presumptuous of me, but I tend to think I might have provided impetus for the entire movement. In the first place, along with my enthusiasm for Stravinsky I had brought back from Paris a number of scores. […] In the second place, I passed on the benefits of my close association with Copland.[596]

In *Reflections*, Berger claimed that even after the term "Stravinsky School" became a standard, its members believed themselves to be a school in name only: they did not see themselves as a unified group. In that respect, he compared the "New Boston School" to *Les Six*, the members of which similarly did not consider themselves a "school" until they were labeled as such by the critics.[597] In one of his earlier comments on the viability of the term "Stravinsky School," Berger stated:

> This is not a group strictly defined by its members or pamphleteers. If the term "group" is at all applicable to the subject at hand, there are groups within groups. Essentially I am writing about separate figures who admire the example set by a dominating master of the century and a common cause has brought them together in friendships, exchange of ideas and severe mutual criticism.[598]

Clearly, geographical proximity and personal connections played a greater role in Berger's definition of the Stravinsky School than a consistently definable

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[596] Child, "A Backwards Glance," 16.

[597] *Reflections*, 71.

[598] Arthur Berger, "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," 203. Interestingly, both Lukas Foss and Benjamin Boretz follow a line of reasoning similar to Berger's in regard to the Stravinsky School, although their assessment of the group differs: while Foss describes himself, Shapero, and Fine as "a club," Boretz prefers to refer to them as "a cult." See Ramey, 49, and Benjamin Boretz, "Records: New Music for Piano" in *Music Columns from the Nation 1962–1968* (Red Hook: Open Space, 1991), 105.

stylistic unity—likely another reason he invoked *Les Six* as a suitable comparison. For instance, study at Harvard and attendance at Tanglewood appeared to be significant for his definition of the group.[599] According to Berger, institutional atmosphere at Harvard was particularly favorable to neoclassical ideology: Walter Piston had neoclassical leanings, while literary critic and scholar Irving Babbitt was also anti-romantic.[600] A close mentor-student relationship with Copland was also important. Indeed, Milton Babbitt referred to the group as the "Stravinsky-Copland disciples,"[601] while Berger summed up Copland's strong influence on the group as follows:

> [Copland's] stature on the American scene casts a sizeable shadow as inescapable to many Americans as Stravinsky's. Certain works of the 'forties by members of the Stravinsky school might have been very different were it not for Copland's contribution. Of these I might mention Shapero's Sonata for Piano Four Hands, Lukas Foss's *The Prairie* (a cantata), Irving Fine's *Music for Piano*, Louise Talma's Piano Sonata, and Leo Smit's earlier piano pieces and ballet music.[602]

Yet the most significant commonality Berger identified between members of the "Stravinsky School," and one that he evidently believed to be the group's defining characteristic, was study with Nadia Boulanger.[603] Musicologist Joan Peyser concurs

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[599] Berger, Fine, and Shapero all studied at Harvard, and Haieff studied with Boulanger in Cambridge, Mass.

[600] *Reflections*, 74.

[601] Milton Babbitt, "Musical America's Several Generations," *Saturday Review*, 13 March 1954, 36. Reprinted in Stephen Pelis, ed., *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2003.

[602] Berger, "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," 205–206.

[603] Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger agree, tracing this connection to Stravinsky through Piston and Copland, and then through Boulanger; see Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger,

with that assessment, writing that "the Boulanger school had its counterparts in New England: Harold Shapero, Irving Fine, and Arthur Berger."[604] Berger himself spelled out the group's common connection in no uncertain terms: "Stravinsky came to Harvard to give the Norton lectures in 1939, […] but I think if he hadn't we would have been Stravinskyites through Boulanger."[605] Berger described Boulanger as a Stravinsky expert, whose knowledge of his style was reflected in her teaching: "Stravinsky said she knew more about his music than he did."[606] With that in mind, Berger disputed Copland's inclusion of Lukas Foss as a member of the Stravinsky School, because, although Foss "was a part of our peer group, [he] had not studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger."[607]

Music of the Stravinsky School in Berger's Criticism

Throughout his life, Berger had many opportunities to comment on the careers and music of the composers associated with the Stravinsky School, both individually and as a group. He also discussed their work extensively in *Reflections*. In regard to Stravinsky's impact, Berger noted: "Almost no one in our fraternity, with the significant exception of Shapero, had recourse to Stravinsky for his 'return to the past,' or for an example of how to do so ourselves. For that, one would have done

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Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky, trans. Jeff Hamburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97.

[604] Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond*, revised edition (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 93.

[605] Ramey, 49.

[606] *Reflections*, 74.

[607] Ibid., 70.

better to turn to Hindemith, who was not interested in allusion or appropriation."[608] Instead, Berger believed that it was Stravinsky's manner of "manipulating tones, timbres, and rhythms" that both profoundly inspired and suggested new creative directions to himself and his colleagues.[609] It was also extremely important for him to highlight the uniqueness of each composer's journey and the individuality of each one's approach to and assimilation of Stravinsky's influence. He was careful to note the pivotal role neoclassicism had played in each composer's career, but was equally determined to point out that the style did not hold sway over the entirety of their output—nor should it have, given the importance that Berger himself placed on compositional innovation, as discussed in Chapter 6. Indeed, he noted with discontent the extent to which association with Stravinsky could color the critical reception of these composers: "Stravinsky's disciples, even those with fully-developed personalities, are stigmatized for their debt to him by critics who disavow him in the first place."[610]

While Berger commented at some point on each of the Stravinsky School composers, the ones whose music he most frequently discussed were Irving Fine and Harold Shapero. His criticism of their works will therefore be the focus for the remainder of this chapter.

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[608] *Reflections*, 70.

[609] Ibid., 70.

[610] Arthur Berger, "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," 204.

Irving Fine

Berger and Fine's personal friendship and professional association began in the mid-1930s, when both were students at Harvard. They remained close until Fine's untimely death in 1962, particularly while fellow faculty members at Brandeis starting in 1953. As a critic, Berger had an opportunity to review many of Fine's compositions, and references to neoclassicism pepper his commentary. Stravinsky's influence was of course frequently remarked upon, Berger once calling Fine one of Stravinsky's "most vital disciples."[611] In his obituary of Fine, he described his friend and colleague as "one of the best of the younger [American composers] who came under the influence of Stravinsky's middle—neo-classic—manner."[612] Always on the lookout for too close an imitation of the older master, Berger also recognized that Fine's personal compositional signature was leaning more toward the neoromantic than the neoclassical manner. As Berger was known to disapprove of what he saw as either imitation or retrogression, it is not surprising to find the following comment in his 1947 review of Fine's *Toccata Concertante*:

> It's a good piece, but it's too close to Stravinsky. That's interesting, because the general feel of Irving's music is not Stravinskian: it has a romantic flow and doesn't have the bite of sharp edges of Stravinsky—the way he cuts up his music to make you uncomfortable. But thematically, here and there, it's surprising how close the *Toccata* is.[613]

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[611] Arthur Berger, "Concert and Recital: Julliard String Quartet," *New York Herald Tribune,* 19 February 1953.

[612] Arthur Berger, "Music Mail Pouch: Irving Fine (1914–1962), *New York Times,* 2 September 1962.

[613] Quoted in Ramey, 91.

A similar tension between the neoclassical and neoromantic leanings are noted in Berger's commentary on Fine's *Partita for Wind Quintet* of 1948:

> It has affable melodic threads, expertly fashioned along thoroughly unpedantic contrapuntal lines, and it is alternately lively and personally tender. […] The official label would probably be "neo-classic," but it might just as well be described as "neo-romantic."[614]

Overall, Berger tended to be critical of Fine's neoclassical works that he felt to be lacking in emotional control, and repeatedly labeled his style as New Romantic or neoromantic. As Fine had apparently disputed such a designation, in *Reflections* Berger appealed to the authority of Virgil Thomson, who had stated that if such a school existed, Fine would be the best candidate as its American representative.[615] Either way, Berger was evidently delighted when Fine's compositional style began to move in an entirely different direction, towards serialism. In a review of the 1952 String Quartet, the critic wrote:

> For Fine, dabbling with themes and chords derived from twelve-tone patterns is something quite new, and the departure from his customary amiable and melodious style was startling. I found remarkable strength, invention and atmosphere in his quartet.[616]

Fine would indeed go on to fully adopt serial techniques, with his new compositional trajectory culminating in his last completed work, the 1962 Symphony. In his obituary, Berger commented thus on Fine's stylistic transformation:

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[614] Arthur Berger, "Composers: Program at Times Hall a Part of WNYC's Festival," [*New York Herald-Tribune*], 21 February 1949. Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[615] *Reflections*, 78. According to Berger, Fine argued that he "was an out-and-out neoclassic composer quite early, and Irving would be a little annoyed at me because I was so anti-romantic." See Ramey, 49.

[616] Arthur Berger, "Concert and Recital: Julliard String Quartet," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 February 1953.

> It is very tragic indeed for American music that one of our best composers should have died while he was so courageously resolving the most critical crisis for the direction of his style: a crisis that was particularly evident in his ambitious symphony (1962).[617]

Clearly, the further Fine moved away from the Stravinsky School, and especially the influence of neoromanticism, the more Berger approved of his music. This is not entirely surprising, as Fine's stylistic evolution paralleled Berger's own. What remains a bit of a mystery is Berger's true feelings on the quality of Fine's work as a composer. He was always respectful in his reviews, a benefit not all of his close composer friends could boast. But he was also not overly effusive about Fine's music until after his friend's death, the tragic circumstance that might have changed the tone of his subsequent commentary. It cannot be doubted, however, that Berger did see Fine as a major figure in the forties and fifties, and would likely have continued to do so, had he lived.[618] And as for Fine's adoption of the 12-tone principles, aligned as it did with Berger's and Stravinsky's compositional evolution, it was unlikely to have endangered his place as a member of the "Stravinsky School."

Harold Shapero

Berger's friendship with Harold Shapero was both close and highly unusual, for it was characterized by the brutal honesty with which they critiqued each other's music. Both were Harvard graduates, and both were students of Boulanger, albeit not at the same time. Throughout the 1940s, Boston-based Shapero and New York-based

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[617] Arthur Berger, "Music Mail Pouch: Irving Fine (1914–1962), *New York Times,* 2 September 1962.

[618] Berger considered Fine's significance to go beyond composition, and spoke of his importance as a teacher and administrator. See *Reflections* and Arthur Berger, "Music Mail Pouch: Irving Fine (1914–1962), *New York Times*, 2 September 1962.

Berger met frequently at musical events and social gatherings, spent time together at Tanglewood, and when apart communicated regularly. In the early 1950s, both were hired to teach at Brandeis, where they worked together until 1978.

Shapero was considered by many, including Berger and Copland, to be the most talented composer affiliated with the Stravinsky School, despite his paralyzing self-doubt and a "puzzling" tapering off of his compositional activity.[619] Notably, Shapero's musical style was also the least Stravinskian of the group. Indeed, in 1949 Berger stated that his fellow member of the School would likely "be astonished to be grouped in this way."[620] In *Reflections*, he explains:

> Shapero may have been a charter member of the young Harvard Stravinskians, but he never went in much for the interrupted line, the jagged shapes, the precipitous cutting, the dissonance, the hiccups, the asymmetry of rhythm, the skeletal textures and other such devices of Stravinsky that appealed to the rest of us.[621]

Berger acknowledged the presence of neoclassical elements in Shapero's 1942 Violin Sonata, but considered them a part of a broader compositional vocabulary at the time, rather than the peculiarly Stravinskian properties. In his review of Shapero's Violin Sonata, he described it as:

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[619] Copland commented: "Harold Shapero, it is safe to say, is at the same time the most gifted and the most baffling composer of his generation." See Aaron Copland, *Copland on Music* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1944), 169. Berger wrote: "Harold Shapero [was] arguably the most talented of us." (*Reflections*, 76). The "puzzling" comment is found in *Reflections*, 77.

[620] Arthur V. Berger "League of Composers." *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 March 1949. Shapero ultimately recognized his position in the school, as is evident in his remarks to Ramey quoted on page 218, n. 593.

[621] *Reflections*, 77.

> Austere, urgent in its rhythmic drive, quite delicate and ingenious at moments, and often drawn toward the abruptly arrested line and stark diatonic asymmetry. These last, to be sure, are Stravinskyan in origin, but plastic and potent enough to have become by now a part of a broader tradition accessible to all. Shapero has already converted them into personal terms that invest with qualities in turn more restrained and more explosive than they originally had.[622]

While Shapero's music may have not been Stravinskian in a similar vein to that of the other members of the School, he was an intimate of the same social circle, and he, too, idolized Stravinsky. When I asked him in an interview how he felt about being grouped in with the school, Shapero quipped: "Why wouldn't you want to be associated with the master?"[623]

Ironically, the master that Shapero was constantly and often brutally admonished for associating with was not Stravinsky, but Beethoven—most notoriously on the occasion of the "Viva Beethoven" incident discussed in Chapter 1. Berger referred to the openly Beethovenian influences in Shapero's music frequently in his writings. For instance, in one 1953 review he argued that Shapero "has carried the implications of classical reversion to a more literal point than his master—to Beethoven, in fact."[624] In *Reflections*, Berger also wondered whether this allegiance to the classical master diminished the value of Shapero's compositional individuality in the public eye. He suggested that the composer's talent might have been "occluded

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[622] Arthur V. Berger, "Paul Makovsky: Young Violinist is Heard in Town Hall Concert," [New York Herald Tribune], 4 December 1948.

[623] Harold Shapero, personal communication, 25 August 2011.

[624] Arthur Berger, "Music: Composers" *Saturday Review,* 14 March 1953, 17.

for most listeners behind the grid of his unabashedly Classical allusion—allusion to Beethoven in particular."[625]

The issue of Beethovenian influence became particularly vital with respect to Shapero's 1947 *Symphony for Classical Orchestra*, a piece that Berger described in his review of it as approaching neoclassicism "from the angle of Beethoven, whose spirit hovers over him these days."[626] Notably, Berger attempted to turn his criticism into a (perhaps somewhat backhanded) compliment, adding that similarly to Stravinsky's music, Shapero's symphony "represent[s] a new kind of traditionalism that has nothing to do with conservatism though it is often mistaken for it."[627]

In hindsight, Berger came to believe that Shapero's Beethovenian influences should have been classified as more neoromantic than neoclassical. In *Reflections*, he puts it thus: "It is not at all unlikely that if Shapero's symphony were composed today without the stigma of being neoclassic it would be accepted as a representative product of the new Romanticism."[628] At the time Shapero's symphony premiered, however, Berger clearly placed it within a neoclassical, specifically Stravinskian

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[625] *Reflections*, 76.

[626] Arthur V. Berger, "At Tanglewood," [*New York Herald Tribune*], 2 August 1948; Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. Copland agreed, commenting: "Stylistically Shapero seems to feel a compulsion to fashion his music after some great model. Thus his five-movement Serenade for String Orchestra (a remarkable work in many ways) is founded upon neoclassic Stravinskian principles, his Three Sonatas for Piano on Haydnesque principles, and his recent long symphony is modeled after Beethoven. For the present he seems to be suffering from a hero-worship complex or perhaps it is a freakish attack of false modesty, as if he thought to hide the brilliance of his own gifts behind the cloak of the great masters." See Aaron Copland, *Copland on Music* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1944), 170.

[627] Arthur V. Berger, "At Tanglewood," [*New York Herald Tribune*], 2 August 1948.

[628] *Reflections*, 78. Indeed, Shapero's Symphony was performed several times in the 1980s.

context, by comparing and contrasting the two composers' distinct approaches to music of the past. He wrote:

> Stravinsky has had vast influence as a medium through whom the new synthesis of past and present has been conveyed. Of all the young men who have come under his dominion I doubt any has responded more violently to the implications of Stravinsky's achievement than Harold Shapero. […] Shapero emulates the sweep, fullness, drama, and long eventful codas of Beethoven—to all of which he comes surprisingly near at times. (I hear some of my readers murmur, 'I could do this pastiche too, but it is not worth the time.' All I can say is, just try. See if you can come up with Shapero's momentum, tunes, and developments.) But where Stravinsky absorbs his stylistic allusions into a thoroughly new context, Shapero tends to be literal, though a certain jazzy sauciness—a bravado—betrays him as a contemporary. Occasionally Shapero seems to drive himself on to fill the preordained proportions, and here lies the main difference from Stravinsky, who never ceases to present glittering, subtle little finds while fulfilling the needs of the grand line. But for the work of a composer in his mid-twenties the Shapero was a *tour de force* in its sheer capacity to maintain such shape through forty-five minutes.[629]

Berger found merit in Shapero's music. He was impressed by its technical flair and the beauty of its melodic material, and consistently defended it in print. However, he was never at peace with his friend's compositional style, wondered at his self-doubt, and wished that he would make a better case publicly for his approach to classical models. He thought that perhaps Shapero's critics might have been quieted if the composer "had made it better known how much he consciously strove to achieve Beethoven's *grande linge*."[630]

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[629] Arthur Berger, "Spotlight on the Moderns: Stravinsky and his Firmament," *Saturday Review*, 27 November 1954, 58.

[630] *Reflections*, 77.

Conclusion

Any piece of writing reveals something about its author. In Berger's case, his criticism usually reflects his concern for more than the music he is immediately writing about, and his assessments of the Stravinsky School's members are closely tied to his affinity for the characteristics that drew him to Stravinsky himself. His worry over Shapero's traditionalism and devotion to Beethoven reflects his drive to witness innovation in modern music. His criticism of Fine's neoromanticism echoes his belief that music should embody its emotive content through formal processes. Nevertheless, he praised their music and advocated for it, perhaps not only because it did impress and satisfy him despite these reservations, but because of his sense that they, along with himself and others, had inherited the neoclassical mantle from Stravinsky, their model, against whom he constantly measured not only himself, but everyone else.

Chapter 8: Writings on Music Theory

Throughout his career, Berger faced the task of choosing the right words to convey his ideas about contemporary music. In some cases, conceptualizing new music required new ways of thinking, and consequently developing a new vocabulary. Berger understood and accepted the challenge that this state of affairs presented, and his approach to the issue played a significant role in his career as a scholar. The present chapter offers an overview of Berger's contributions to the field of music theory and analysis, and touches upon the reception of his most consequential ideas.

New Terminology in the Academic Setting

Musical developments in the twentieth century posed a new challenge for writers, especially in the area of theory and analysis. In a context removed from common-practice tonal functions, a group of notes became, to some musical thinkers, a set, either ordered or unordered; a chord became a simultaneity or verticality; a minor third became 03, a major third 04. Berger referred to such terminology as "the new theory," and although he expressed some skepticism regarding the specifics of it, he supported the idea in principle. He allowed that using the terminology intimately connected to tonal music could introduce inaccuracies into analysis, as an old term grafted onto a new idea might obscure, rather than clarify, its meaning. Proficiency in tonal harmony was not sufficient for the purposes of analysis and teaching of modern music. This was particularly (albeit by no means exclusively) true of serial composition; as Berger put it, it was now imperative that an analyst know how to

"operat[e] within the discipline of serialism."[631] Furthermore, it was not far from the minds of those academics who were advocating for the establishment of a Ph.D. degree in composition—a notion that Berger supported—that a new and complex terminology would contribute to their field's credibility.[632] Berger wrote:

[631] *Reflections*, 87.

[632] It is important to note that the movement for the establishment of a doctoral degree in composition required that the new degree was specifically a Ph.D., and not just any doctorate. "Doctorates of one kind or another," Berger later wrote, "were being offered here and there in the United States, and in the Midwest it was as soon available to a tuba player as to a composer. This new initiative proposed by the caucus of Ivy League professors aimed at a degree that would not simply be any doctorate but a Ph.D. supported by prestigious institutions." (*Reflections*, 143). In the early 1960s Berger became involved with the movement, spearheaded by Babbitt and musicologist Arthur Mendel, both on the faculty at Princeton, to gain support for a Ph.D. as the terminal degree in composition and/or theory at their institution and at others, including Brandeis. According to Berger's account, the representatives from UC-Berkeley, Brandeis, Columbia, Yale, and Harvard formed a committee chaired by Mendel to discuss the issue (*Reflections*, 143–144). They believed that a degree with any other name would not be afforded the same prestige. With the universities moving towards viewing Ph.D.-holders as preferential hires, many capable theorists and composers saw themselves losing jobs to musicologists who might possess a Ph.D., but not be specialists in either theory or composition. The advocates of a composition Ph.D. recognized the risk that non-Ph.D. holders would eventually be automatically eliminated from consideration without regard to mitigating factors (Berger himself fell into this category). Berger was adamant that as part of the medieval *quadrivium*, music should be assigned the same terminal degree as the other fields in the group, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The Princeton committee, in a proposal document signed by Babbitt, Mendel, and Edward T. Cone, drew correlations to mathematics departments that required Ph.D. earners to "create new mathematics," not just write a dissertation on the history of mathematics. (The Princeton document can be found in the Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.) In what appears to be part of a proposal for instituting the degree at Brandeis, Berger outlined the following requirements for degree seekers: A theorist, he suggested, "should have some idea of the history of theory, but not as a musicologist. Emphasis on modern theory. Includes acoustics, analysis, aesthetics—philosophy department—methodology—concepts of theory construction, formal and analytical systems […] (philosophy of science, logic, aesthetics), criticism." Composers should know "analytical theories (classical and contemporary music)," and have an "intimate knowledge of music literature." A composer could write about an original theory that relates to his own work, or the work of another. For Berger's proposal for the degree at Brandeis, see his notes on the subject, and his correspondence with Arthur Mendel, including a letter from Arthur Mendel to Arthur Berger, 13 December 1961; all in Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

> A faithful account of current musical thought must necessarily reflect the diverse ways in which some of us are searching, at times tentatively, clumsily, or inscrutably, for a new theoretical approach motivated by a profound reaction against the woolly, otiose attempts at explanation and the inflexible definitions that have been allowed to achieve the sanctity of divine law through the sheer inertia of almost everyone concerned with music.[633]

Berger proposed that the process of creating the new terminology should not rest on just one group of people, be it composers, musicologists, critics, or theorists. He considered the discipline of musicology insufficiently open to the elements of the new theory and their applications. Placing the responsibility on composers, however, introduced its own plethora of complications. Some composers believed that dissecting a work would destroy it, or as Berger characterized this position, that "the art work is inviolable and the composer who attempts to violate it commits what amounts to a self-destructive act."[634] Other composers, by contrast, engaged in intense theoretical conversations, believing that discourse of this nature "stimulates creativity and may be essential to their successful functioning *qua* composers." Yet composers were often insular, communicating with "no one but themselves and one another."[635] Furthermore, composer-theorists risked public censure and accusations of inauthenticity, for a compositional process explainable in such technical terms surely could not be driven by creative inspiration.[636] As Berger summarized the problem,

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[633] Arthur Berger, "New Linguistic Modes and the New Theory," *Perspectives of New Music* 3, no. 1 (1964): 1.

[634] Ibid., 6.

[635] Ibid., 5.

[636] Ibid.

> [W]hether they present their theoretical ideas well or lamely, composer-theorists are liable to be viewed with suspicion, their creativity seriously placed in doubt in the eyes of those—among them some of their most distinguished composer colleagues—who believe that an absorption in directly apprehended qualities is upset beyond repair by any digression into discursive thinking or talking about these qualities, and above all by the type of analysis productive of those writings are summarily dismissed as "technical"[…]. To avariciously guard the creative experience as an "intuitive," indivisible, and mysterious affair is the prerogative of some composers; and virtually to boast of total lack of interest in the "technical" studies not only is their prerogative, but in the case of older generations may even be a justifiable necessity, since very likely their most disturbing compositional problems have by now finally been worked through to their satisfaction, and to a point where doubt may actually be inhibiting.[637]

Berger argued that it was not necessarily ideal for a composer to be seen as the final authority on the theory underlying his own music. He explained his reservations thus: "The most verbally articulate composers are dominated by ultimate allegiance to expression in a nonverbal medium and should welcome someone else to represent their viewpoints, to help solve their problems."[638] Instead, Berger suggested, all interested parties should be responsible for the formation of the terminology for new music, for to be truly effective, it must be derived by consensus, understood, and used consistently. A rationale behind the creation of *Perspectives of New Music* was in part to offer a forum for this discourse. This goal is outlined in the journal's first issue:

[637] Berger, "New Linguistic Modes and the New Theory," 5–6.

[638] Ibid., 5. It was, of course, a problem that non-composer advocates for new music were all too few.

> Another consequence of the absence of a journal like *Perspectives of New Music* is that the younger generation of American composers has been deprived of a focus for the orderly development of its thinking as well as of a forum in which to evolve linguistic modes for communication. *Perspectives of New Music* will provide such a forum and encourage young composers to deal with their perplexing problems.[639]

In order to facilitate the discussion, Berger himself contributed two articles on the subject of terminology to the journal, in addition to touching upon the issue in his writings on other topics.[640] But the collegial debate he was seeking did not take place, as the leadership in creating the new theoretical vocabulary was spearheaded mainly by Babbitt and the Princeton School. While Berger was not opposed to their proposed terminology per se, he intimated that the process of its development was disruptive to the field, stating:

> We were not quite prepared for such an esoteric language—especially trying for those of us who were not at ease in science—that aimed at brushing away the cobwebs, the ambiguities, the metaphysical baggage of traditional musicography, not only in treatment of serial music, but that in any music at all.[641]

Berger found it problematic that the Princeton School introduced new terms to replace those he thought were already sufficient: "chord" became "simultaneity"; "row" and "series" a "set."[642] In addition to the complexity and extent of the new

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[639] Arthur Berger and Benjamin Boretz, "Editorial Note," *Perspectives of New Music* 1 no. 1 (1962): 5.

[640] The articles are "New Linguistic Modes and the New Theory" and "Some Notes on Babbitt and His Influence," *Perspectives of New Music* 14, no. 15 (1976): 32–36.

[641] *Reflections*, 85.

[642] Ibid., 85–86. Berger, for example, argued that "As I see it they are still chords, even if they are merely the convergence of contrapuntal lines and are not built in thirds like traditional triads, seventh, and ninth chords. […] It seems to me that we should be able to use the locution 'chord' without summoning up the ghosts of tonally functional harmony."

lexicon, in terms of how many aspects and types of music it touched upon, Berger disliked the air of secrecy that surrounded the process of its development, and complained that little was being done to ensure the dissemination and understanding of the new analytical language beyond the group involved with creating it. He placed partial blame for this on Babbitt's students: "Instead of revealing the meaning, they are apt to confront us with the appurtenances, which serve as a barrier. […] I often wish they would address themselves to explicating as ardently as they devote themselves to emulating him."[643] As a result of this lack of communication, inconsistencies in meaning and usage proliferated, and were made worse, in Berger's perception, by the continuous introduction of yet more new terms, further obscuring the discourse.[644] Looking back, Berger suggested that, while books and articles had eventually been written to clarify the new vocabulary, they arrived too late to help those struggling at the early stages of its development.[645]

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[643] Berger, "Some Notes on Babbitt and His Influence," 32, 34. Berger was clear that his feelings on the terminology created by the Princeton School had no bearing on his enjoyment of Babbitt's music, commenting: "I may consider myself not yet prepared to approach Milton's music in terms of his avowed constructs, but this does not mean I do not apprehend it as a listener." He further stated that "the primary reason for wanting such knowledge is not in order to listen better, but to enjoy the satisfaction of 'knowing', of grasping what we experience." (34) Berger asserted that listening to music, analyzing it, and composing it were distinct, if linked, phenomena, which could not be approached as a single activity. As examples, he pointed out that the composers whose music Schenker analyzed were not consciously using the theoretical thought process Schenker used to describe it. Similarly, Berger suggested that Babbitt analyzed Schoenberg's twelve-tone music with a reference to the concepts that would not have been operating consciously in Schoenberg's mind while he composed. Berger's main point here appears to be that the separate nature of listening, analysis, and composition both afford and legitimize multiple points of view about the same works and concepts, and as there is no single correct way to hear or understand a piece of music, the enjoyment of it does not need to be supported by specific prior knowledge to be genuine.

[644] Berger provides a list of offenders, who he calls the "cream of the intellectuals"; among them are theorists Ben Boretz, Godfrey Winham, Jim Randall, Michael Kassler, Philip Bastone, and John Rahn. See *Reflections*, 88.

[645] *Reflections*, 89. The useful publications Berger specifically mentions are Winham's annotated edition of Babbitt's "Some Aspects of Twelve-tone Composition," and the article "A Budding Grove" by Edward T. Cone. See Milton Babbitt, "Some Aspects of Twelve-Tone Composition," *Score and*

Berger's Contributions to the New Theory

Berger himself was not immune to the trend of inventing new technical vocabulary, and he later recognized the inconsistency of his own position. Specifically, while outlining the various orderings of the diatonic collection in his article "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," to be discussed below, he dispensed with the traditional names for modes, replacing Dorian with D-scale, Phrygian with E-scale, and so on.[646] Similarly to the logic behind replacing "chord" with "simultaneity" for non-tonal music, by avoiding the traditional mode names, Berger wished his readers to disassociate from "the baggage the modes had accumulated over the centuries as the mainstay of Greek and medieval music and especially the associations that clung to them as a result of their evocations of the gentle pastoral in some early modern music of Impressionist leaning."[647] He was also in part responsible for coining the term "white-note diatonicism" to refer to "diatonic writing with no or almost no accidentals."[648]

I.M.A. Magazine (June 1955): 53–61**;** and Edward T. Cone, "A Budding Grove," *Perspectives of New Music* 3, no. 2 (1966): 38–46.

[646] Arthur Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," *Perspectives of New Music* 2, no. 1 (1963): 11–42.

[647] *Reflections*, 86.

[648] Ibid., 89. Berger's discussion of the matter in *Reflections* is a re-writing of a passage from an article from twenty-five years earlier: "It did not take me long to realize that what I had considered a commonplace came out of the language in which we had communicated among ourselves, we being the group of Boston neoclassicists around 1940. I could not vindicate myself by insisting the meaning should be evident from the words chosen, for a year earlier [in 'New Linguistic Modes and the New Theory'] I had expressed disapproval of precisely this as an argument." Arthur Berger, "Some Notes on Babbitt and His Influence," 34. In *Reflections*, the passage reads: "We used the term in our group of Harvard Stravinskians around 1940 and we thought it was perfectly obvious what it meant. The Greek chroma is 'color,' therefore, the absence of *chromatic* alteration would result in a situation 'without color'—ergo 'white.' Also the exemplary diatonic scale, C major, without chromatic alterations consists of the white keys [of the piano]" (*Reflections*, 89).

In later years, Berger admitted that some of his terminological overhaul might have been unnecessary:

> "D-scale" (Dorian), "E-scale" (Phrygian), etc. As I look back it seems to have been quite unnecessary. (I should add that I'm aware it is nowhere on the grand scale of Princeton terminology but, as one who has complained as loudly as anyone about the new esoteric Princeton language, I feel I should report my complicity in the hope it may help me avoid the remonstration "you did it too.")[649]

He also came to believe that certain innovations, such as the term "pitch-class," and the practice of numbering from 0-11 instead of 1-12, had been useful.[650] But despite these admissions, he retained his overall opinion that the new terminology created by Babbitt and the Princeton School, and particularly the manner of its dissemination, had been largely detrimental to the early understanding of atonal music in general and serial music in particular.

Octatonic Scale

Berger's frustration over the new theory and its terminology underlies both the impetus for and the reception of his best-known and most frequently cited piece of writing, the article "The Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," which appeared in *Perspectives of New Music* in 1963. Little did Berger know at the time of its printing how wide-reaching and controversial it would become.

At the beginning of the article, Berger expressed his concern that the presently available music-theoretical vocabulary was insufficient to offer a comprehensive analysis of Stravinsky's approach to pitch organization. He wrote:

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[649] *Reflections*, 86.

[650] Berger, "Some Notes on Babbitt and His Influence," 35, and *Reflections*, 88.

> Anyone who undertakes an investigation of the essential relationships of tones in the works of Stravinsky may find himself somewhat at a disadvantage as a result of the fact that no significant body of theoretical writing has emerged to deal with the nature of twentieth-century music that is centric (i.e. organized in terms of tone center) but not tonally functional. There are, to be sure, a number of labels in circulation for referring to this music: pantonality, pandiatonicism, antitonality, modality, tonicality-even "atonality" has been stretched to embrace it.[651]

Berger believed that a new approach was urgently needed to address such "centric" music, one that did not view it through the lens of tonality. This solution would allow, to the largest extent possible, a study of what this type of music does, instead of what it does not do.

Berger recognized that Stravinsky's pre-serial works were heavily based on the octatonic scale. At its most basic, the octatonic scale is an eight-note scale that consists of alternating half-steps and whole-steps, with either interval serving as a starting point. About his introduction of the term, Berger wrote: "I assumed it was only natural, since it had eight tones, to refer [to the scale] as 'octatonic' by analogy with the already existing pentatonic, which has five. I made no claims of 'discovering' it."[652] He was keen, however, on receiving recognition as the creator of the term "octatonic."[653]

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[651] Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," 26.

[652] *Reflections*, 186. Indeed, Berger did not claim to have discovered the scale, pointing out that Messiaen had listed it among his "modes of limited transposition," and that composer Roman Vlad, who had written a book on Stravinsky, also mentioned the scale, although he did not discuss it at length. See Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," 20, n. 8.

[653] While Berger may have claimed the name to be intuitive, it is clear that he was somewhat sensitive about having originated it. In a letter to Richard Taruskin he questioned a statement published in the latter's book *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* that reads: "Analysts today call it the 'octatonic.'" Berger wrote: "Now it is my understanding that the locution was first used in my 'Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky' and no one in all of these years has given me to believe otherwise. […] I was convinced that no one would be in a better position than yourself to confirm whether the scale now known conventionally as 'octatonic' was indeed named by me." In response, Taruskin assured Berger that he had given him credit in an earlier article, on which the chapter was based. See Richard

In "Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," Berger divided the observations he was presenting into four categories which he listed as:

I. Diatonic writing in which "tone center" is not functional "tonic"

II. A symmetrical scale used in such a way as to emphasize tritone relation

III. The same scale with minor-third emphasis

IV. Interaction between diatonic elements of I and the symmetrical scale of II and III.[654]

Berger demonstrated that Stravinsky was able to exploit the similarities and differences between the diatonic and the octatonic scales to secure a type of structural functionality without resorting to the language of the common-practice period. He preferred to analyze Stravinsky's octatonic scale usage in terms of the ordering beginning with a half-step, at least in part because it features a perfect fifth above the starting pitch, while the one beginning with a whole-step does not; he saw Stravinsky as having exploited this property at times. The octatonic scale also provided Berger with a coherent and comprehensive explanation for some of the vertical aspects of the works of Stravinsky's so-called neoclassical period.

The chapter on the octatonic scale included in Berger's *Reflections* is adapted from an October 1998 lecture on the subject, which he delivered as part of the

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Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996), 122; letter from Arthur Berger to Richard Taruskin, 21 August 1996, and letter from Richard Taruskin to Arthur Berger, 31 August 1996; both in Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[654] Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," 12. The numbered list is quoted directly from the article.

Harvard music department's colloquium series.[655] Armed with hindsight, Berger took an opportunity in the lecture to reflect on some of the weaknesses of his earlier article. For one, he now thought he had been overzealous in his speculative statement (i.e., one not intended as part of the analysis of Stravinsky's practice) that octatonicism was, in addition to enabling a type of pitch centricity, the next closest thing to atonality for creating music *without* a tonic or tone center. The relevant statement in "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky" reads: "It would be a simple step to the conclusion that short of the twelve-tone and so-called 'atonal' procedures, nothing provides this condition better than the octatonic [scale]."[656] Berger commented:

> When I wrote this I realized that it was indeed highly speculative, almost a fantasy, but I fear it did not come out as such. It was a burst of unwarranted enthusiasm on my part, and I regret it. One does not play around this way, I suppose, with the rigorous tenets of theory, especially when they are regarded in some circles as science. […] In donning so many different hats: critic, journalist, educator, composer, theorist, and even at one time musicologist, I have not always been sure which professional code I have been bound by. […] I do regret the burst of enthusiasm and any idea I may have conveyed that I was assimilating octatonic procedure to Viennese atonality.[657]

Berger also argued that he could "now take credit for what particularly amounts to a scavenger hunt in recent decades for octatonic occurrences in music of the Classical and Romantic periods."[658] He was not displeased with this development,

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[655] In *Reflections* Berger takes pains to specify that the chapter "is largely the content of that lecture." A typescript of the original lecture is located in the Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. It is labeled "Octatonic—Harvard lecture" in Berger's hand.

[656] *Reflections*, 196; "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," 25.

[657] Ibid., 196.

[658] Ibid., 189.

as he thought that making theoretical connections of this sort between new music and music of the past could present the older music in a new light, causing the listener to conceptualize it differently.[659]

Berger never asked Stravinsky about his thoughts on the octatonic scale. He explained that, "knowing how he tended to clam up, […] I was afraid he'd react badly. Also, those were the years in which he was already in decline."[660] A lack of Stravinsky's endorsement of his theory did not present a problem for Berger. As mentioned above, it was his oft-stated belief that one does not need a composer's permission to analyze or hear a piece of music in a certain way, even if it differs from the composer's intention.

Reception of "Problems of Pitch Organization"

Berger's article in *Perspectives* did not go unnoticed. Other music theorists and musicologists joined and expanded upon the conversation both privately and publicly. Berger himself contributed his public thoughts on two additional occasions: the aforementioned lecture he gave at Harvard in 1998 and the chapter in *Reflections* based on it. In the 1990s Berger also started corresponding privately with several scholars he felt had misunderstood or misrepresented something he had written. This sudden influx of correspondence was at his own initiative, and seems to have been in response to the revival of interest in the theories of octatonicism, itself precipitated by

[659] To demonstrate his point, Berger cites measures 252–255 of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 in G Major, where the octatonic pitch collection is present as a result of two out of the three possible diminished seventh chords placed in conjunction with each other. See *Reflections*, 189–90.

[660] Letter from Arthur Berger to Richard Taruskin, 9 September 1996, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

the writings of musicologist Richard Taruskin—specifically, the publication of his 2-volume monograph *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (1996).[661] Apart from Taruskin himself, Berger also wrote to three Stravinsky specialists in the field of music theory, Pieter van den Toorn, Joseph Straus, and Dimitri Tymoczko.

The earliest piece of scholarship to which Berger responded was an article by van den Toorn, that had been published in *Perspectives of New Music* in 1975.[662] Van den Toorn used Berger's findings as a starting point, to the extent that the first third of the article is a self-proclaimed paraphrase of Berger's article. He stated: "In addition to quoting directly from Berger in these preliminary remarks, I am also paraphrasing liberally, seeing on the one hand no reason to alter what has already been presented in a thoroughly efficient manner."[663] He then provided further evidence to support Berger's ideas, but also found fault with them, stating that "Berger finds little use for the whole-to-half step interval ordering and the (0 2 3 5) tetrachordal partitioning."[664] Van den Toorn felt that both Berger's preoccupation with Stravinsky's neoclassical works and his preference for the opposite ordering

[661] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996).

[662] Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Some Characteristics of Stravinsky's Diatonic Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 14, no. 1 (1975): 104–138.

[663] Ibid., 114, n. 6.

[664] Ibid.

"ignore[d]" a significant aspect of Stravinsky's usage of the octatonic scale, especially in the Russian-period works.[665]

Berger felt thoroughly betrayed by van den Toorn's article. He believed the latter was insinuating that he had not recognized the whole to half-step ordering in Stravinsky's works, and therefore required correcting.[666] In reality, the entire debacle was most likely over an unfortunate word choice rather than a scholarly snub. Berger had made a conscious decision not to focus on the 0 2 3 5 ordering, so he could highlight Stravinsky's use of the opposite 0 1 3 4 collection in the neoclassical works. Recognizing this, van den Toorn expanded on the theory by pointing out the occurrences of the 0 2 3 5 collection in works from Stravinsky's other style periods. Yet Berger felt publicly embarrassed by the manner in which van der Toorn presented his findings. In a letter to the theorist, he stated:

> Any mention of my pioneering work on Stravinsky's octatonicism is now, as a result of your book, likely to be accompanied by a caveat that diminished what I have done. […] Perhaps you are old and wise enough now to realize there are no absolutes and there is more than one way to approach a subject. […] Departing from my suggestions you were making a real contribution in formulating a whole theory. It was not necessary to run me down to establish your research as original.[667]

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[665] Van den Toorn, "Some Characteristics of Stravinsky's Diatonic Music," 118 and 122. Van der Toorn's use of the word "ignore" on p.118 incited Berger's ire, as evident from the letter quoted below. See Arthur Berger to Pieter van den Toorn, 22 August 1998, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[666] *Reflections*, 187. In "Problems of Pitch Organization," Berger's table on p. 20, his note 8 on the same page (particularly his spelling out that there is an "ordering in which there is a semitone between [the] first and second degrees," which would be superfluous if there were not an alternative ordering), and the chart located on p. 35, and his discussion on p. 36 describing the properties of the half-whole ordering as opposed to those of the whole-half ordering, and all indicate clearly to the attentive reader that Berger recognized two possible orderings (and three possible transpositions, as he also makes clear in p. 20, n. 8, referencing Messiaen) for the octatonic scale.

[667] Berger to van den Toorn, 22 August 1998.

It is curious that Berger waited for twenty-three years before responding to van den Toorn's article, and that he did so in such a confrontational tone. He sent the letter in August, and he lectured on the octatonic scale in October, so it is possible that he re-read (or read, for the first time) the article in the process of preparing for the presentation. It is perhaps still more curious in light of an extant letter from van den Toorn to Berger, written eighteen years prior to the one cited above. It reads, in part:

> For some time now I have been meaning to write of the immense benefit I derived from reading of your own studies in this field. It seems to me that 'Pitch Organization in Stravinsky" is already something of a classic. While others, like myself, had been aware of octatonic complications (I read the article 10 years after publication), it helped give me a sense of direction and pinpoint critical issues.[668]

Robert Craft also contributed to the perception that Berger neglected the whole-to-half step interval ordering. In his 1993 book, *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life*, he wrote: "The term became general currency through Arthur Berger's 1963 essay, though Berger's description did not include the sequence of alternating major and minor seconds."[669] Berger did not react kindly: "That maven of Stravinskyana, Robert Craft […] should have known better."[670] He does not appear to have written to Craft on the topic, but in a letter to Taruskin several years after Craft's book was released, he questioned whether Craft had even understood his argument: "Could be that Craft, like so many other readers, thought I was just writing about the scale. […] The

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[668] Letter to Arthur Berger from Pieter van den Toorn 5 August 1980, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[669] Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 303. This is a curious phrasing on Craft's part, because the scale consists of "alternating major and minor seconds" regardless of which interval is considered to begin the sequence.

[670] *Reflections*, 188.

intersection of the octatonic and the diatonic could very well have escaped Craft […] because he only had patience for serialist ideas at the time."[671]

In *Reflections,* Berger noted his surprise that theorist Allen Forte chose to write on the topic as well: "It was beyond my wildest flights of the imagination that so rigorous an analyst as Allen Forte would condescend even simply to have recourse to the term in analyzing Webern (though what he does with the interval collection has nothing to do with what I do with it.)"[672] The Webern analysis was actually Forte's second publication that focused on the octatonic scale: his "Debussy and the Octatonic" appeared three years earlier in *Music Analysis.*[673] Both the Webern and the Debussy essays used the term "octatonic" and named Berger as a scholar responsible for coining it, which clearly pleased him. He did complain, however, in a letter to Taruskin that Forte's "one-dimensional mind" had not seen how the octatonic scale could be a "useful compositional device of the present."[674]

Part of the reason Berger had waded back into the octatonic discourse seems to be that within that discourse, van den Toorn's 1975 article became a kind of a

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[671] Letter from Berger to Taruskin, 9 September 1996, Arthur Berger papers, NYPL. In the same letter Berger claimed that by the 1960s his "close relationship" with Craft had "cooled," as well as claiming: "I might have had something to do with bringing him together with IS." It seems unlikely that this bold claim could ever be corroborated, so we may have no choice but to see it as a fanciful story. Still, it could be suggested that it would have been dangerous to claim friendship with Craft to Taruskin, a Stravinsky expert who was undoubtedly acquainted with Craft, if it was a mere fabrication. It can also be noted that among Berger's papers there is a significant number of letters between himself and Craft, several of which discuss personal meetings; the letters continue steadily through the fifties but taper off thereafter, which confirms at least the first part of Berger's story.

[672] *Reflections*, 196. Berger refers to: Allen Forte, "An Octatonic Essay by Webern: No. 1 of the *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet,* Op. 9," *Music Theory Spectrum* 16, no. 2 (1994):171–195.

[673] Allen Forte, "Debussy and the Octatonic," *Music Analysis* 10, nos. 1–2 (1991): 125–169.

[674] Berger to Taruskin, 9 September 1996.

companion piece to Berger's own, and because of his aforementioned concerns, he was not pleased about it. In a letter to Joseph Straus, Berger criticized him for speaking of his and van den Toorn's articles in tandem in the theorist's own contribution to the debate, the 1982 essay "Stravinsky's 'Tonal Axis.'"[675] Straus replied that despite Berger's dislike of the practice, pairing the articles was now so common, no one should be castigated for it.[676] Although Berger's approach was rather aggressive, Straus's reply is remarkably patient, respectful, and even conciliatory. It opens with the reassuring "I have always admired you deeply," and continues as follows:

> I am not sure why you consider [what I wrote] anything other than a compliment. […] If I did not make my gratitude to you clear in my article, then I certainly apologize, because I feel it strongly. […] I deeply regret that what I now understand to have been my somewhat arrogant tone has offended you. […] At the time I wrote the article, I was deeply appreciative of your work, and I have become more so in recent years as my knowledge of Stravinsky has deepened. I hope, therefore, that you will be willing to forgive my youthful excesses.[677]

Berger responded at least somewhat apologetically, opening his letter with: "Thank you for your gentlemanly and measured response to the outpouring of an angry old

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[675] Arthur Berger to Joseph Straus, 29 December 1996, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL. The article to which Berger was responding is Joseph Straus, "Stravinsky's 'Tonal Axis,'" *Journal of Music Theory* 26, no. 2 (1982): 261–290.

[676] Straus wrote: "As you may not have read a lot of recent Stravinsky scholarship, I should tell you that you and van den Toorn are frequently referred to in the same breath. For a pertinent recent example, see Taruskin's book on pages 739 and 937. And I think there is good reason for this conjunction, namely that it is through the two of you, whatever your differences, that the rest of us have understood the role and uses of the octatonic collection in Stravinsky's music. So, while you may chafe at the link to van den Toorn, it seems to be an enduring feature of Stravinsky scholarship and the sin, if it is one, is by no means particular to me." See letter from Joseph N. Straus to Arthur Berger, n.d. [Between 29 December 1996 and 27 January 1997], Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[677] Straus to Berger, n.d.

man." He nevertheless issued the following request: "I should appreciate it should you return to the subject if you were to make some mention of the difference in my approach."[678]

Notably, van den Toorn also took exception to Straus's article. Two years after it was published, he defended both himself and Berger from what he perceived as a misrepresentation of their views in a letter to the editor of the *Journal of Music Theory*. The letter asserts, in part, that "misunderstandings of earlier studies by Arthur Berger and myself are apparent in Straus's article."[679] It could be argued, however, that van den Toorn's objections to Straus's essay, like Berger's, were less than justified. Nothing had been portrayed inaccurately, and no one had been misrepresented; rather, the three scholars simply differed in their concerns and points of view, and therefore presented contrasting analytical arguments.

The most recent theoretical re-conceptualization of Stravinsky's use of the octatonic scale to which Berger responded was a 2002 article by Dmitri Tymoczko.[680] Tymoczko argues that while the octatonic scale does permeate Stravinsky's works, scholars such as Taruskin and van den Toorn take Berger's argument to the extreme and place too much emphasis on Stravinsky's use of the scale. He admits that in many cases the scale does function in his music as described by these scholars. He argues

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[678] Letter from Arthur Berger to Joseph Straus, 27 January 1997, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[679] Pieter C. van der Toorn, "Letter to the Editor," *Journal of Music Theory* 28, no. 2 (1984): 323. Evidently, Berger either forgot this fact by 1998 or was never aware of it in the first place.

[680] Dmitri Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration," *Music Theory Spectrum* 24, no. 1 (2002), 68–102. Tymoczko, composer and theorist, and teaches at Princeton University. He was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley at the time of this article. For more information see <http://dmitri.mycpanel.princeton.edu/bio.html>, accessed 28 January 2019.

instead that "the instances of purported octatonicism actually result from two other compositional techniques: modal use of non-diatonic minor scales, and superimposition of elements belonging to different scales."[681]

In the first part of the article, Tymoczko outlines his belief that Stravinsky's music is in direct lineage from the French Impressionists. In the second, he argues that the composer's tonal language is based on chordal superimpositions, and although the resulting subsets can be identified in terms of a scale, this was not the manner in which Stravinsky approached his melodic and harmonic material.

In a letter to Berger, Tymoczko asserted that in his article he "return[ed] to something more like [Berger's] original views."[682] Berger appears to have read Tymoczko as returning instead, at least in part, to an earlier theory that posited Stravinsky's use of polytonality, and essentially agreed to disagree, responding: "My preferring the octatonic explanation [of the Petrushka chord] is like your preferring the polytonal one."[683] Van den Toorn, conversely, was moved to respond publicly to Tymoczko, defending his own work along with Berger's and Taruskin's in a substantial published rebuttal.[684]

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[681] Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration," 68.

[682] Letter from Dmitri Tymoczko to Arthur Berger, 15 July 2002, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[683] Letter from Arthur Berger to Dmitiri Tymoczko, 21 July 2002, NYPL.

[684] See Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: The Sounds of Stravinsky," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 167–202.

Correspondence with Taruskin

As evident from the discussion above, Berger and Taruskin communicated with each other regarding the octatonic scale and Taruskin's discussion of it in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*.[685] In addition to Berger's aforementioned concern over his role as the progenitor of the term "octatonic," he offered Taruskin his unsolicited input on the book's treatment of the octatonic scale, offering points of clarification, praise, and criticism. Overall, Berger was complimentary about Taruskin's scholarship:

> I don't think that, when I really get down to reading and studying, that our different viewpoints will prevent me from profiting from you[r] impeccable scholarship, analytic sharpness, and ability to hold the reader's attention—though I may get a little angry here and there.[686]

Taruskin's letters appear equally cordial.[687] The one dated 31 August 1996 begins as follows:

> As I told you quite some time ago when sending some of my writings in anticipation of your disapproval, […] I have long admired you from afar as a Stravinskian analyst, to be sure, but most of all as a composer.[688]

In his initial letter, from 21 August 1996, Berger had thanked Taruskin for calling his article in *Perspectives* "historic" in *Stravinsky and the Russian*

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[685] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 122.

[686] Letter from Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[687] It is unclear whether remarks such as Taruskin's "I was just thrilled to get your recent letter (typographical warts and all)" (letter from Taruskin to Berger, 31 August 1996, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL) or Berger's insinuation, seen later, that Taruskin would not have been aware of writings outside scholarly journals (letter from Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996), were meant as jocular, collegial banter, or whether they were actually to be taken at face value. Both letters are in Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[688] Taruskin to Berger, 31 August 1996.

Traditions.[689] Taruskin responded: "Calling your 1963 article historic was only stating a fact. All modern Stravinsky analysis descends from it. All worthwhile modern Stravinsky analysis, I'd better qualify."[690]

In the same August letter, Berger offered a detailed commentary on the relevant portions of Taruskin's book.[691] He agreed with Taruskin that he did not give *Les Noces* the same careful treatment in his article as he afforded *Symphony of Psalms*, stating: "I believe it reflects my bias, since I was obviously impatient with it compared to the more thorough treatment I gave the neoclassic *Psalms*."[692] Berger argued that his lack of focus on the whole-step-half-step octatonic collection had not resulted from a lack of understanding or a failure to notice the scale's existence; rather, he had simply found it less interesting than its counterpart:

> Van der Toorn is responsible for spreading the notion that somehow I missed or was unaware of the octatonic [scale] starting with the whole step, and I notice that Craft picked it up. But my neglect of the form starting with the whole step was a matter of preference which, not being a rigorous analyst or historian, I felt free to indulge.[693]

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[689] Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996.

[690] Taruskin to Berger, 31 August 1996.

[691] In response to Berger saying that he no longer wrote reviews, Taruskin wrote, albeit perhaps simply to be cordial: "I am really sorry that you no longer write reviews, and so will not review my book. It would be so much more valuable to me to have your detailed feedback than it has been to receive admittedly pleasant but fairly vacuous raves from Griffiths and the others who have reviewed it so far." (Taruskin to Berger, 31 August 1996)

[692] Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996.

[693] Ibid. As stated above, van den Toorn never claimed that Berger had missed it, but instead felt that he had not given it the attention he believed it warranted—a direction in which van den Toorn's own study turns.

Since he wrote the article as a composer rather than a historian, a point he made on other occasions, he never intended it to be a comprehensive study of the octatonic scale or Stravinsky's use of it.[694]

Berger suggested that Taruskin's argument would have benefited from the use of example 17 of "Problems of Pitch Organization of Igor Stravinsky."[695] He noted: "You might have then said even some of the apologists for the neoclassic Stravinsky recognize the 'Russian' Stravinsky still powerful in the neoclassic works." He continued parenthetically:

> Your generation might not know that in the '30s and '40s there were perhaps two or three advocates for the neoclassic Stravinsky in the mostly hostile daily and periodical press and I was one of them. There are numerous non-scholarly articles and reviews in places where scholars like yourself would not think of looking for them.[696]

In his second letter to Taruskin, Berger eloquently summed up his position on octatonicism and its use in Stravinsky's oeuvre. He proposed that one should make neither too much nor too little of the octatonic concept:

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[694] Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996. Berger restated this in *Reflections*, writing: "I should have put out a shingle reminding my readers I was a composer-critic and I should have asked them to bear in mind […] that there is more than one way of dealing with any given subject." *Reflections,* 196.

[695] There are four excerpts labeled 17a-d in the article, which are as follows: 17a: "Danse du diable" from *Histoire du Soldat;* 17b: *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*; 17c: *Symphony in Three Movements*; 17d: *The Rake's Progress*, Act II, Sc. 3. See Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," 39–40.

[696] Berger to Taruskin, 21 August 1996. Taruskin responded in kind: "I am very well aware, moreover, of your journalistic activity, which you assume someone my age would not know about. We scholars may range more widely in our investigations than you realize. But you were still a presence when I came musically of age." (Taruskin to Berger, 31 August 1996.)

> The octatonic scale in the way I[gor] S[travinsky] uses it [has] a quality that's unmistakably his. But such recognition is but a way station on the path to perception of the music of which the scale is part. As we proceed to take in the totality—perceive it, not name or analyze it—the scale becomes involved with other events, and it is this interaction that we attempt to grasp in analysis of the totality of pitch relations. The person who talks about "wrong notes" just has not read what we have to say. None of us claimed the scale counted for the totality. As a matter of fact, it's stupid and barely warrants attention. And what of the side effects of the scale? Quite a number of people now have a better idea of how the music is made. And, in a way that new music can cast light on music of the past, we have become more conscious of the scale's use by composers of the Romantic era, and also we have found (or become more aware) of a useful compositional device of the music of the present.[697]

As seen here and noted above, Berger was open to investigating the nineteenth-century usage of the octatonic scale, and nothing in his public or private writings suggests differently. This did not prevent Taruskin, however, from implying otherwise. The discussion of the octatonic scale has continued vigorously, most recently in the form of a 2011 special issue of the *Music Theory Spectrum*, in which Taruskin's article "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov" appeared, followed by eight responses, including contributions from Van den Toorn and Tymoczko.[698] Taruskin's essay reiterated yet again that Berger had supposedly failed to recognize the whole step-half step possibilities of the octatonic scale (a falsity that has already been discussed here at length), and attributed the idea to van den Toorn:

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[697] Letter from Berger to Taruskin, 9 September 1996, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL.

[698] Richard Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 169–185. The article was a revision of a keynote address given at the 2010 international Rimsky-Korsakov conference in St. Petersburg, Russia.

> Rejecting Berger's proviso that representations of the octatonic scale, properly so called, must begin with the half step rather than the whole step so as to emphasize its distinctness from the diatonic scale, van den Toorn showed that the two versions of the scale had different properties, and that Stravinsky had exploited both.[699]

Taruskin then correctly noted that Berger's "Problems of Pitch Organization" had not discussed the pre-Stravinsky origin of the scale, and therefore not attributed Stravinsky's knowledge of it to its established role in the Russian musical traditions or to the teachings of Rimsky-Korsakov:

> I had begun investigating the early music of Stravinsky from an historical rather than purely inferential perspective, and I knew something that Berger and van den Toorn did not: namely, that the octatonic scale was widely known among Russian musicians in the years of Stravinsky's training, and that it was known in Russia not only as the gamma ton-poluton (the "tone-semitone scale") but also as the korsakovskaya gamma (the "Rimsky-Korsakov scale").[700]

Taruskin was referring in this passage only to Berger's 1962 article. But that article was not Berger's final word on the subject. His interest in the octatonic scale did not cease, and his knowledge of the scale's origins expanded, in large part through Taruskin's research. By 1998, when Berger presented his Harvard lecture, he not only recognized the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov on Stravinsky's use of the octatonic scale, but also complimented Taruskin on his contribution to the topic: "The octatonic [scale] served as an inspiration for Rimsky-Korsakov, who in turn passed a certain preoccupation with it on to Stravinsky—especially in his earlier, so-called Russian period, as Richard Taruskin established with brilliant scholarship."[701] Even if

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[699] Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," 173.

[700] Ibid., 174.

[701] Arthur Berger, "Octatonic— Harvard Lecture," TMs, 1998, Arthur Berger Papers, NYPL, 4.

Taruskin was initially unaware of the contents of the lecture, Berger had also long since written in *Reflections* (also noted and quoted by Taruskin himself): "I vaguely remembered having seen some mention of a succession of whole-and-half steps in, of all unexpected places (to me at least), Rimsky Korsakov's *My Musical Life* many years earlier. Perhaps I should have looked up the passage but my approach was not historical."[702] Nevertheless, in closing, Taruskin seems to impart to later Berger not only a (continued) lack of scholarly interest in historical details, but a desire to avoid, or even to repress them. To do so, Taruskin turns to Robert Craft's recollection of Berger's 1997 quip regarding the octatonic scale: "I wish I had never mentioned it."[703] Taruskin comments: "Arthur Berger, having found a key to a new room in the mansion of music theory, opened the door, took fright at what he saw lurking within, and, like Bluebeard's bride, tried to lock it up again."[704] This seems an unfair characterization of an off-hand remark that, even if reported accurately, was far more likely, in light of all the evidence, a reference to Berger's feeling that too much had been made of the scale.

Despite the debates surrounding the octatonic scale, the enduring significance of Berger's work on it is unquestioned. Despite their disagreements, even Taruskin—surely one of the most influential Stravinsky scholars active today—not only freely acknowledged Berger's impact on his own ideas, but openly recognized Berger's

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[702] *Reflections,* 187. Quoted in Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," 175.

[703] It is also remarkable to see a second-hand quotation from an autobiography given such weight by an author who just four pages earlier had opined that "the only reason to write a memoir is to lie." Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," 179.

[704] Ibid., 183.

contribution to Stravinsky studies as a whole. He wrote: "I think it is fair to say that Berger's article stands as the most important single contribution to understanding Stravinsky's composing technique, and as the foundation of all subsequent analytical work on Stravinsky's music."[705]

[705] Taruskin, "Catching up with Rimsky-Korsakov," 173.

Conclusions

In 2003, Anthony Tommasini stated: "Mr. Berger commands plenty of respect within his field."[706] As has been demonstrated in this study, Berger's writings on music not only commanded the respect Tommasini spoke of, but also deeply influenced the way new music was perceived and discussed throughout the second half of the twentieth century and until today.

Starting with his earliest critical writings, printed in widely distributed newspapers and magazines, Berger sought to publicize the music of modern, particularly American composers. An ardent and vocal supporter of neoclassicism, he consistently advocated Stravinsky's music, never wavering in his belief that the entirety of that composer's output was influenced by neoclassical principles, and that these contributed to his mastery. Following Prall, his mentor in the field of aesthetics, Berger opposed those dismissive of neoclassicism as unemotional by embracing the formalist stance that equated form with feeling.

Berger was steadfast in his belief that the greatest composers were innovators, and that to become trapped stylistically or to produce art solely to please the masses was a betrayal of modern music. He publicly grappled with this idea in his writings on Copland, including his seminal biography of that composer, and introduced the concept of "The Two Coplands" into the public consciousness. Throughout his life, he championed Copland's music, especially the austere works he had most prized, advocating for their performance throughout his lifetime.

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[706] Anthony Tommasini, "A Disc Worth Waiting a (Long) Lifetime For," *The New York Times* (30 March 2003).

Berger's theoretical and scholarly contributions were far reaching. As the co-founder of *Perspectives of New Music*, his tenacity and vision contributed to the creation of a platform for advanced theoretical discourse. His own writings published therein were of significance, especially his article "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky," which introduced the term "octatonic" into the lexicon of Stravinsky studies, and the fallout from which has lasted for over half a century.

This dissertation lays the necessary foundation for future Berger scholarship. In particular, an in-depth study of Berger's compositions is yet to be written. Together with the contents of this project, such a study would complete a comprehensive portrait of a significant figure in the 20th-century American musical landscape.

Present in most every aspect of his country's musical life for several decades, Arthur Berger had occasion to don many hats indeed, and he wore them all with consummate professionalism and lasting impact. The ever-eloquent Benjamin Boretz summarized the multi-faceted nature of Berger's contribution thus:

> [Berger] was, really, the one American composer and thinker who fully converged the intellectual constructs emergent in the world of Igor Stravinsky, Nadia Boulanger, and Aaron Copland with the analytic/creative ideas arising in the aftermath of Arnold Schoenberg and Heinrich Schenker, particularly in the orbit of Roger Sessions and his American students. […] But, moreover, he had, and shared with anyone interested, a wide-ranging experience and involvement, extremely rare among the composers of his generation, with analytic discourse and compositional theory […], as well as aesthetic philosophy. […] And it was actually an output of his global seriousness, rather than simple ideological commitment, that he was intellectually and musically opaque to other, more counter cultural, aesthetics, philosophies, and musics evolving with equal energy within the post-war musical world.[707]

[707] Benjamin Boretz, "*Invention* (An Offering in Memory of Arthur Berger)," *Perspectives of New Music* 41, no. 2 (Spring, 2003): 5.

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