

## ALEC BERNSTEIN AND MUSICAL ASSERTION THROUGH INSTRUMENTATION

Though most musical traditions are intimately linked to the human voice, almost every "classical" musical culture has relied upon the continuity afforded by some specific instrumental construction. The gamelan, vina, piano, bagpipe, guitar, oud, and many other instruments have sustained long "classical" traditions. In fact, from this perspective it is difficult to see the music of these traditions as an independent entity, not intrinsically bound to the history of individual artists who have followed one another in the development of approaches to their specific instrument of choice.

The saxophone, which was invented in 1840, was accepted in Europe much more slowly than photography, which was discovered around the same time. The European composer was very involved with old instrumental traditions during this time (piano, violin, orchestra). In the U.S., a much more fluid condition prevailed, especially as popular music became successful. In fact, the adoption of "new," Black-culture based instruments, by leading white popular performers is a hallmark of U.S. music.

As Black U.S. music has become more "classical," white U.S. "classical" composition has consistently moved away from dependence upon an instrumental tradition. For an example of Black classical instrumental development, one might select the history of jazz saxophone playing - from Parker and Lester Young to Coltrane and the present - as a progressive tradition which during its course has swayed or even dominated the whole of jazz. On the other hand, the expansionist and isolated U.S. white community has long responded to the centrifugal musical impulses of its cultural pluralism and populism. Innovations in instruments in this country have a long and successful history, perhaps drawing inspiration from 19th century manufacturing concerns like Chickering: at the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, which featured a large number of displays of musical instruments from all countries, the award of highest honors went to a Chickering piano, to the amazement of British and French firms.

American innovations in popular instrument manufacturing reached a peak around the beginning of the 20th century in the player pianos of Aeolian and QRS, the bizarre stringed instruments of Gibson, and, one might add, the invention of the phonograph. Looking back from today, the iconoclastic and isolated early 20th century American composers like Ives, Cowell, Partch, and others appear much more coherently a part of the general cultural move toward modernism than they must have at the time of their greatest activity.

Whether the phenomenal independence of avant-garde "classical" American composers of the first half of this century is attributable to modernist insight or to rugged individualism, the fact is that they executed work which was resonant with the most progressive European concepts of composition (excepting the 12-tone system). Ives' father had worked on a quarter-tone stringed instrument, rigged with violin strings; Cowell studied instruments in use all over the world; John Cage composed for brake drums in the '30's and slinkys in the '50's. In brief, the "serious" American composer may readily situate himself within a grand instrumental tradition of non-standard instrumentation.

Today's scene exhibits factors which bear upon this non-standard-instrumentation tradition in a more complex way. First, the maturation of formalism and abstract art has given deep colorations of meaning to the use of electronic instruments. Second, the soaring advances in technology have made electronic instruments a practical reality, whatever their formal value may be. Third, recordings and media have opened up world-wide awareness of the richness of musical strategies and instrumentations which have been sustained everywhere. Fourth, the Western economy and culture have encouraged people to seek progress in all things, to aspire to newness or novelty, but to do so within the curbing boundaries of existing cultural or economic institutions.

At the same time that modernist formalism supports a progressive view of cultural history, it also leads to a position which identifies the artist's gesture or motivation as central to the value of the work. The performing composer is in a situation analogous to the painter who makes the gesture of painting a part of his work. In a yet purer form, as with Acconci, the attitude as expressed by and through the artist's act is itself the substance of the work. Still, Acconci is not a composer, and he does not make music. So where is the line separating the performing composer from non-music?

It would seem that the performing composer becomes simply an improvising jazz musician, unless he moves out of music altogether. La Monte Young first recognized this problem, and moved deliberately to institute his art within a long-standing musical tradition. This deliberate move, in fact, marks a virtual culmination or apotheosis of modernism.

Within the tradition of modern "serious" composition, the concatenation of personal gesture and iconoclastic instrumentation marks one viable and relevant course for the responsible artist. Few musicians working in this area have carried with them the wit and poetic breadth which typify Alec Bernstein. Where his instruments at first suggest a purely whimsical sensibility, one must persist in the direction of a larger metaphor, often related to death. In this respect, the performance becomes something of an allegory: the performer, in exercising his cultural presence, situates himself opposite material devices, the instruments, which surround the living performer in his task just as the inanimate world ultimately confronts us with our mortality.

As this allegorical assertion becomes clearer, Bernstein's activity moves further away from the imperative of musical gesture; the gesture has in some sense been displaced into the instruments themselves. At P.S. 1 in New York this fall a collection of special instruments will be curated by LAICA. Obviously these instruments are not sculpture per se; they will attract musicians and composers; but they are not music. In the line between the act of playing and the coherent tradition of the instrument some mysterious element of music lies exposed and ready for articulation. By asserting this specific conundrum, Alec Bernstein's music participates in a larger gesture pointing toward the future of the instrument as a tool for serious composition.

Tony Conrad  
10/79

LYDIA LUNCH : TEENAGE JESUS AND MORE

"So for the first thing, the knight will have power to concentrate the whole content of life and the whole significance of reality in one single wish... If he lacks this intensity, if his soul from the beginning is dispersed in the multifarious, he will never get time to make the movements, he will be constantly running errands in life, never enter into eternity, for even at the instant when he is closest to it he will suddenly discover that he has forgotten something for which he must go back."

- and -

"Faith therefore is not an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart, but is the paradox of life and existence. So when in spite of all difficulties a young girl still remains convinced that her wish will surely be fulfilled, this conviction is not faith... for her conviction does not dare in the pain of resignation to face: Impossibility."

- and -

"The demoniacal has the same characteristic as the divine inasmuch as the individual can enter into an absolute relation to it."

- Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (1843)

Performance artists, and perhaps among them Vito Acconci in particular, made it clear during the early 1970's that the responsibility of the artist might be situated directly at the gates of consciousness: that art may be seen as a function of intention, of conception, and in particular of attitude. Since then many careful-thinking artists have rooted their work in the act of presenting their own personality: the exposure, the offering, of the artist's own personality-surface as a considered act, as the most sincere and calculated act of art-making.

However, we the audience of critics and lovers of art are then seated at the side of God, in the end; we are being offered these souls to evaluate, to weigh against the coin of the personality which each offers us. A new sensibility has been called into being, in order to confront the deluge of distorted humanistic sequelae to this position: what about the personality of the non-artist? ...of the goldfish?... a video monitor? Jesus!

In the sweep toward a new Destiny, toward a new sounding of absolutes in the sea of the spirit of Art, Kierkegaard's "single wish" stands for the

kind of resolve and intensity which the artist must sustain while moving toward a solution. And so in its ultimate maturity we find Modernism finally able to reach back upon itself, to absorb its antithesis, to honor the rejected absolutes of Nineteenth-Century art... and of the Nineteenth-Century artist. The artist Is, in a very important sense, again a visionary, engaged in a higher trial than everyday life offers most of us: engaged by those matters which make life an ongoing encounter with "the paradox of life and existence."

Here is Lydia Lunch: the banner for her battle with life is swept clear of personal needs: the banner for her battle with art is emblazoned with the name which is most paradigmatic for the absolute battle of life: her battle flag is too direct and strong for carrying into any but the most intense encounter: it is emblazoned SIN.

Make it clear: this "battle" is not to be a playground game. The grand gameplan of the war of Sin is a war of life, which is played on the field of life. No one will expect Lydia Lunch to play out this battle in front of an audience. What a repulsive and self-defeating notion, that the game of Sin might be fit for spectator sports.

Through her performance, Lydia Lunch might in a sense be thought of as putting us in communion with the last battle, which she emblemizes for us. This confrontation is one which we must grasp directly and intensely, without withering from it. This is art, to be sure, and is only a display; we are not invited into the action, but we can only watch effectively by finding the action within us. What this action is within us, and how we find it, and its relation to Lydia Lunch, are all questions which seem more to have parallels in Zen philosophy than in Occidental art.

None of this goes toward making up an explanation of Lydia Lunch; at best, it may reach toward being an appreciation of the complex artistic problem which she offers us. The delight of this problem is that it also comes in such glamorous garb: unbridled intensity, garish contours, unrelenting symbolism, and glaring formal anomalies. For example, some of the songs are so shrill, so short.

There have been short songs in rock music; groups like the Everly Brothers and the Four Seasons cut stunning songs under two minutes long. But these songs were cut for convenience in formatting. When we try to find music which was made short without concessions to formatting, we must reach for some of the most intense and impactful composers of the twentieth century. Anton Webern's music, which is stunningly terse at its best, attempts to put "a whole novel in a single sigh," as Schoenberg put it. Of course, Schoenberg himself did not really get the idea, for he himself returned to a Brahmsian sweep of time-use in his own work, leaving Webern to continue for his life, working short. Schoenberg might have understood better, if he had appreciated that working short is simply a sign of the composer's ability to be satisfied. Webern's security, his economy, condense in his work and in his personality. "Unlike Schoenberg and Berg, Webern was all his life an atonal composer without tonal nostalgia," says Robert Craft, and he continues, "It must be admitted that the short pieces are difficult to program; they embarrass other music and are ill-mannered next to a normal-length piece."

Tony Conrad/Music  
Programming

# HAWAII

30 Essex Street, Buffalo, New York 14213

November 29, 1979 8:30 pm

THE PERFORMING COMPOSER:  
PETER GORDON

THE GOOD CIVILIAN  
a solo performance  
by  
PETER GORDON  
Solo songs, with organ  
and tapes

Also on the program: Videotape from performances by The Love of Life Orchestra, recorder at Max's Kansas City and at Hurrah, in New York City

Also on the program: Altered to Suit, a film by Lawrence Weiner, with sound by Peter Gordon

In saying recently that he is occupied, as a composer, with creating new structures out of a common language, Peter Gordon identified a program of endeavor that is extremely broad in scope. Of course, the fact that individuals are able to articulate new structures is in itself a property of a "language;" to make meaningful progress within the "language" of music still remains a dumbfounding problem. Significantly, though, the very artists with whom Peter Gordon has chosen during the past several years to collaborate are artists whose inscribed intentions have a direct bearing on language, structure, and the common interest: among these are Lawrence Weiner and Laurie Anderson.

In a measuredly untrenchant review (Artforum, September 1979), Carrie Rickey comments on "Commerce," Peter Gordon's recent collaboration with Laurie Anderson: "Their disarming mix of class consciousness, self-consciousness, entertainment and didacticism makes this 25-minute performance a particularly winning one... They set up a series of oppositions: music versus prattle, banquet versus grub, their work versus the audience's play." In attending to this work as theater, a sense is lost... the reviewer, floating on the audience's tide of interaction, never measures the waterline at the beach: at the beach of musical language, the assimilation of work and play, banquet and grub, music and prattle releases the terms for an enlargement of musical intercourse; an enlargement of musical linguistics, within the structures of the common language.

The danger, that increased powers invoked through the assimilation of unresolved antagonisms (like the unresolved antagonisms among subatomic particles, bound into a more stringent and efficacious unit) will actually go unnoticed altogether, is clear and present. In brief, how can such important work turn out to sound so GOOD? Peter Gordon's record, "Star Jaws" (Lovely Music/LML 1031), is pleasant to hear, runs largely to song performances in familiar formats, and accomplishes a startling and new sensation in the listener: that s/he hears disturbingly new music for the first time and LIKES it.

In order to accomplish this objective, a measure of sophisticated remove must

inhabit the composer; he must be ready to recognize that music is prattle, that banquet is grub, etc., and yet to proceed in the vacuum left by this certainty/uncertainty with unerring faith. Peter Gordon has the particularly diverse and intense musical background that make this analysis plausible.

He was born in New York City in 1951, and grew up in Virginia, Germany, and California. He played reeds as well as keyboards, worked with a lot of bands, and pursued composition in the course of studies at U. C. S. D. and at Mills College, working with Kenneth Gaburo, Roger Reynolds, and Bob Ashley. More recently, his work with the Love of Life Orchestra has involved performance at both art/music spaces (The Kitchen, i. a.) and New York clubs (like Hurrah and the Mudd Club). The artists of the Love of Life Orchestra include Kathy Acker, Ernie Brooks, Rhys Chatham, Kenneth Deifik, Ed Friedman, Scott Johnson, Jill Kroesen, Arthur Russell, David Van Tieghem, "Blue" Gene Tyranny, and Peter Zummo.

With a working mixture of concept, personnel, and musical experience, each of which ingredients has been urged to its richest, it is not surprising that Synapse Magazine calls his music "rich instrumental textures of compelling rhythm" (in a review of 'Star Jaws'). Still, at this point perhaps Peter Gordon himself is the most authoritative and descriptive source of information concerning his larger aims as a composer. He, in referring to "Dancing Civilians" (a large work in progress which includes much recent material, and in particular "The Good Civilian" and the material we see on videotape - which was shot in New York by John Sanborn), gives one the sense that this overall work is like a large polygon, and that each of the songs or pieces which make it up might be thought of as corners or points of the larger form. Each piece, Peter says, represents some association with an emotional state, or, in musical terms, represents a particular harmonic archetype.

Since he is also interested in polytonality and counterpoint, one might wonder how the concept of harmonic archetypes could translate immediately into the human terms of a particular "emotional state;" the clue to this transformation is the embedding of musical statement in a common language - or, to put it more succinctly, an interest in music that is catchy. Perhaps, though, it has always been true that great music which reaches for emotional resonance has the elusive quality of sounding simple, whatever the deeper nature of its construction.

In notes for "Extended Niceties," performed at the New Music/New York Festival at The Kitchen Center in June, 1979, Peter writes that "things usually work out, even Lydian hexachords and augmented triads in fourths... "Extended Niceties" is the coexistence of mutually incompatible entities in a nice way."

Tony Conrad  
Music Programmer

# HAWAII

30 Essex Street, Buffalo, New York 14213

DECEMBER 9, 1979

THE PERFORMING COMPOSER:  
JEFFREY LOHN

## JEFFREY LOHN: NEW ORCHESTRATIONS

Jeffrey Lohn's group, Theoretical Girls, has released a 45 single which includes a song called "U.S. Millie." Though the strident tone, insistently off-ballad lyrics, and rock instrumentation tie this cut to recent popular music (as well as to repetitive and monotonous American avant-garde music), there is a deeper voice that resonates within this song: "U.S. Millie" somehow has the overall ambience of nothing so clearly as Virgil Thompson (the Virgil Thompson of "The Mother of Us All"). Yet, without the serious setting of Thompson's music, Lohn's work in other instances turns one to thinking about Kurt Weil.

In some manner, Jeffrey Lohn has touched a nerve which animated also the work of Copland, the middle Stravinsky too; but particularly the most American of composers, from Ives to Harrison. It is particularly startling to find this sense of identity so clearly articulated in the setting of a music movement which is purportedly post-"Punk," or No-Wave; one almost has the sense that one is hearing wrong. Yet Lohn's angularly harmonic orchestrations, with daringly orchestral instrumentation and large, gestural rhythms, all fit together to form a correspondence with day-before-yesterday's American academic music.

At this point you may feel that I intend to say that Jeffrey Lohn's work is mannerist, or derivative, or academic. Yet the value in his statement is precisely that he achieves a new quality of immediacy; that nothing he has produced can fit the rubric of mannerism, nor is there anything academic or derivative in the sound he achieves. If anything, Lohn's music is startlingly fresh and unexpected, rich in texture and association, and brashly direct in its execution.

Although this music turns my attention toward Copland, Thompson, and Weil, it does so in a curious way: my interest in their particular music itself is not directly stimulated. Listening to Jeffrey Lohn doesn't bring me any nearer to wanting to play my "Billy the Kid" and "Appalachian Spring" records; rather it makes me wish to understand WHAT WENT WRONG: where did we lose the thread of a vital music, a music which might have pushed ahead and achieved what Lohn has done, rather than devolving into a bleak academicism?

The original American "moderns" were not modern so much as individualist: this is clearly witnessed through the biographies of Ives, Cowell, Partch; when the immigrant tide of modernism broke upon American shores around the time of World War II (as was so spectacularly delineated by the sharp changes voiced in American painting at that time), the ascendancy of the European modernist idiom within American music was assured. The "serious" American composer emerging after the War was forced into retreat. There were two directions to go, both of them exemplified by Leonard Bernstein: show-biz, and conservative American orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, the American music establishment was taking a beating. Modernism in music cleared a substantial plateau in the work of John

Cage, who beat the Europeans at their own game, even as these same European modernist composers (Boulez, Lygati, Stockhausen, etc.) were securing their own ascendancy within the mainstream tradition of the whole North Atlantic culture.

In 1960, it was unthinkable that a forward-looking young avant-garde composer could renew the roots of American music which had been set out by Copland and his generation. Some, like Frederick Rzewski, did strike out in a relevant but individual direction, but this activity could not hold the tide. Even in show-biz, the vital charge which had been characteristic of Weill as well as Gershwin and Porter gave way to a blander romanticism.

Stockhausen, who in pieces such as "Gruppen" and "Carre" introduced exciting theatrical qualities, for example giving the conductor the power to use the orchestra gesturally, as a unit instrument under the conductor's organically articulated baton; this Stockhausen, a victim of his own rhetorical posture, could not develop the new orchestration further. Instead he moved under the sway of Cage and post-Cagean Americans (particularly La Monte Young).

In Lohn's music, curiously, the theatricality of the conductor's role plays a vital part in the performance. Working with small ensembles about the size of a jazz band, Lohn harnesses new energies, which are set free from the harmonic roots that might otherwise stifle them by two mediating circumstances: (1) The whole somewhat awkward matter of handling a complex orchestration within a small ensemble lends an aura of pain, immediacy, and relevance to the fact of articulation of the music. (2) The complex incursion that popular music has made upon the turf of serious music in recent years has opened up the total range of musical experience, throughout all time and space, placing all within the provenance of today's composer.

When everything is open to the composer to use, the obstacle to further work is eclecticism. Thus, I do not do Jeffrey Lohn a service by linking him too securely with a past tradition. Fortunately, this is not at all my intention. Rather, I feel that there is a particular excitement in seeing this forbidden area of American music renewed, made suddenly and so surprisingly accessible and vital.

Jeffrey Lohn was born in 1947, studied at Md. State U. and U.C.S.D., and took an M.A. in writing at Johns Hopkins. Perhaps most importantly, he abandoned music composition in 1971 for work in language and philosophy, and returned to music only in 1978. At the festival New Music/ New York held last June at The Kitchen Center, he was represented by "Humans Know How Many Toes They Have Whether They Are Looking at Them or Not." He offered several instrumental works for small ensembles and a vocal work for string quartet and three female voices at The Kitchen November 23-4, 1979.

Tony Conrad  
Music/Video Programmer



# HAWAII

30 Essex Street, Buffalo, New York 14213

DECEMBER 15, 1979 8:30 pm

THE PERFORMING COMPOSER:  
ARTHUR RUSSELL

## STYLE AND INDIVIDUALISM: A FUNDAMENTAL CRISIS IN MUSIC

There exists, within the reaches of the contemporary idiom in American music practice, a virtually unrecognized and unheralded group of practitioners; a group with unparalleled cultural perception and heritage, with particularly American sensitivities, and with a driving commitment to the fact (tho possibly to none of the specific extant forms) of music. In identifying the qualities which unite this scattered but precious group, I find it necessary to pose problems about the way an American musician emerges within our cultural conglomerate.

La Monte Young is fond of relating anecdotes about Terry Jennings, for whom he has the greatest respect. Terry Jennings was working on the Cage Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano when he was twelve. La Monte reminded me recently of how Terry, when he was about this same age, walked in on a rehearsal at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music, where they were running through the Schoenberg Wind Quintet, Op. 26. The score for this quintet includes clarinet, an instrument with which Terry had worked, but the parts are all written in C; most clarinet music is written in the key of the instrument (B flat, D, E flat, etc.). Nobody could handle the C-clarinet part, so Terry sat in, and sightread the score.

When talent and interest this prodigious is exposed to the historical challenge of European "classical" music, it responds by readily reading out the clear messages of the modernist development (of the last hundred years). Several simple personal challenges are clear: a "great" composer makes a "breakthrough" in the expanding development of the system of harmonic usage; an alternate construction of the challenge is that a great composer avoids cliché, in the interest of a new and personal style that sets the common front of musical knowledge forward in new areas.

A sensational example of the first type of construction is afforded by the comments of Charlie Parker about his own development during the late 1930's: "I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes, but I couldn't play it..." And, as he worked with guitarist Biddy Fleet, he started to unearth this new harmonic material: "...a relative major, using the right inversions, against a seventh chord, and we played around with flatted fifths." Parker's example is particularly important, as it demonstrates the power available to a composer who assumed full control of the western harmonic system, and used this control as a function of performance. This system had emerged over the course of many years of development by composers and performers within the European tradition; rarely has it been applied so flexibly and inventively, so manifestly under the direct control of the performing composer himself, as it was by Parker.

Reading about avant-garde music (e.g. 12-tone music) in books written as recently as 1960, one finds that the availability of recordings of new music is a

real problem, that exposure to the music itself was so occasional as to pose a fundamental obstacle to understanding the composers. Today, at last, modernist music is very available. However, we must bear in mind that the SHOCK of hearing atonal or other recent avant-garde music for the first time is fresh in the experience of even the most engaged student of composition. A revelation of new forms of committed experience: the great composer creates work that is disturbing, uncomprehensible, defiant, and beyond the pale.

This is a great and highly charged image for mid-twentieth century modern music to carry; by about 1970 it gradually became clear, even in academic circles, that modern music tended, in sad point of fact, to fall into a categorization of one or two different styles. This idea of an avant-garde style of music, so difficult to accept and in fact so nearly contradictory in nature, seems to point to hidden ties between fashion and the modernist, progressive modality. In the same interval of time, it also became more widely recognized that other and often long-standing cultures (in India, Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia) sustained long commitments to "classical" music traditions. Like the European tradition, these currents of activity are complex, sophisticated, and rewarding. Unlike the European tradition, many of these cultural directions did not seem to incorporate the illusion of progress or necessary change.

In this situation, committed American musicians have found it important to assert individualism precisely by asserting their relativistic position with respect to these various TRADITIONS. Americans have been directed toward non-individualistic traditions, but only on account of their own particular need for an assertive individuality. The final complex turn on this condition is realized by examining the interaction between composers and instruments: an interaction which is crucial to almost every living style or tradition.

Today there are many American composer-performers of vast accomplishment who have chosen to lend primacy to their own interaction with an instrument. Though this shares something with the more naive instrumentalist-based traditions around them, this American composer's bond to his/her instrument is colored by jaded cosmopolitanism, rather than by provincialism. However, there is often also a conscious choice to opt for obscurity, or at least a retreating public posture; this retirement is clearly a further rejection of fashion.

To cite individual musicians - composer-performers who are astute, active, retiring, often very seminal within the community of musicians, and who are almost unknown to the outside world - is not to assign to each or any of them the precise role in American music that I have suggested; however, it deserves to be recognized, finally, that among these - Terry Jennings, Arthur Russell, Jon Gibson, Terry Riley, and many others - there is certainly to be found a coherent and dynamic position, with the utmost significance to the ongoing course of serious American music.

Of course, I have removed myself in the above from consideration of that latest and perhaps most curious "tradition" of music performance, Rock. I assume that it is easier to see the sway of fashion upon the needs for an ongoing music revolution when one looks at popular music influences than in any other case I've cited.

Tony Conrad  
Music/Video Programmer

# HAWAII

30 Essex Street, Buffalo, New York 14213

THE PERFORMING COMPOSER:

DAVID VAN TIEGHEM

December 15, 1979

## TIMING:

### DAVID VAN TIEGHEM PERFORMS "A MAN AND HIS TOYS" (BEGUN 1977)

David Van Tieghem authorizes the legend that he began music with pots and pans at age four. His later work included study at the Manhattan School of Music and performance in very sophisticated ensembles (Steve Reich Ensemble, Manhattan Percussion Ensemble, and many others), but something of the directness and gestural immediacy of the four-year-old remains:

"Van Tieghem did his increasingly legendary "A Man and His Toys" solo piece... in a manner that combines mime, musicality, and infantile comedy of the Jonathan Richman strain." (Davitt Sigerson, Melody Maker)

"Van Tieghem's ability as a performer (is) to switch from being skillful and earnest to being outrageous. He made this change several times during his show and every time took the audience completely by surprise... Van Tieghem prefaced his last piece... with a description of shows he used to give as a boy. He would stand on a tree stump facing the steps of his front porch and sing and dance..." (Stephanie Woodward, Soho Weekly News)

Western music shuddered with the impact of Edgar Varèse's "experiments" in music based solely on percussion; other composers of the first part of the century were also known as "percussion" composers: John Cage, and of course the Futurist noise-musicians. In hindsight, it is most curious that the discrete message of percussion, in the absence of melody, should have presented such dense conceptual obstacles to Western ears. Most cultures, both classical and informal, sustain traditions in performance with solo percussion.

The nineteenth century had delivered many wonders to European music listeners; the strain that winds its way through nineteenth-century music most decisively is the expansion of harmonic structure and understanding on the one hand, and the growing sophistication in the use of melody on the other. Thus it might not have been noticed by our forebears that both harmonic motion and thematic involvement depend basically on dramatic movement: without anticipation, dramatic emotionalism, and the sense of tension-with-resolution, harmonic impulse and thematic statement lose much of their characteristic nineteenth-century turgidity. One might now safely say that the function of rhythm and gesture was to act as an invisible foundation for nineteenth-century music. Then it was quite a shock to find that the precious gains of the Great Composers could be stripped away, and that Varèse could still be delivering MUSIC.

Another suspicion in the minds of early twentieth century listeners was that percussion was "primitive." This problem was socio-pathological, and had a lot to do with the appearance of popular music, the discovery of "ethnic" music, and the crumbling of old imperial political patterns around the world.

Another sense in which percussion is "primitive" is the directness with which rhythm and gesture connect to the movement of the human body, and with the ebb and flow of human feeling. The precise value in this side of "primitive"-ness has taken some time to become clear. In painting, where the quality of gesture and motion is evident only in the careful study of the brushstroke, the discovery that gesture could prove to be a valuable currency was important, and gestural primitiveness is thematic to post-World War II artistic conception.

In music, on the other hand, gesture and the sway of rhythm have stayed so close to the surface of musical activity that it is almost difficult to stand far back enough from percussive gesture to see what meanings it might convey in and of itself. The stage is set, in music, for percussion and gesture to be more completely explored than ever: artists not only in painting but in performance, theater, dance, and conceptual media have in the last ten years evolved a new relevance with reference to direct gesture. David Van Tieghem, in interposing a kind of smokescreen of theatricalism and props between his gesture as a performer and the norms of musical performance, has formed the context necessary for us to move slightly off from music, that we might look back on it and see the percussive gesture more clearly for its own sake.

This kind of music making is quite different from the kind which we found in the percussion, for instance, of Steve Reich. Reich's discoveries are about new things which we might be able to hear within rhythm, about new artifacts of rhythm itself which bring our renewed attention back to the sound itself. On the other hand, Van Tieghem's music, while remaining every bit as musical as we wish it to, redirects our attention to another area: what is rhythm about?

Rhythm, we might find, is first about striking out into the world. "Striking out into the world"?...from where? Van Tieghem is decisive: the first way we have to see striking out into the world is through the eyes of childhood. Why can percussive gesture supply so complete a metaphor for our (child-originated) interaction with the world around us? Perhaps there is no more direct affirmation of our feelings and perceptions than the test of touching. The things we see are real, in some meaningful manner, because we can touch them. The contact with our body reaffirms the gestalt of external events in the infant: if you touch something, you can also hear it. In fact, the meaning of toys is the seeing, touching, and hearing of them. In affirming external realities through touch, a human also asserts their <sup>own</sup> physical being: affirming what is real outside the body places the body in the world of natural objects. Perhaps this, then, is one thing that Van Tieghem places on center stage: percussive gesture is the origin of the contact we all feel between material objects and events on the one hand, and body movement, nerve stimulation rhythms, and emotions on the other hand.

A simple demonstration of these connections is not enough. It is not the point to merely identify the role of toys in forming a complete individual experience: the point is to weld this understanding into its proper and fitting place within the experience of music. The movement of nerve, muscle, and limb, these are part of it; but also the affirmation of emotional qualities through touching and striking, and the feeling of anticipation that we sense as an audience to these events, all become aspects of a unifying conceptual presence within the performance.

Tony Conrad/Music Programmer