

Temperaments, Tonalities and Microtonalities: An Introduction

Christopher Fox

James Tenney has argued that the harmonic development of Western art music reached something of an impasse around 1910 and that it was only when composers began to imagine music that went beyond 12-tone equal temperament that our harmonic evolution could continue (Tenney 1984: 75). This issue of *Contemporary Music Review* is an attempt to document some of the ways in which musicians have contributed to that evolution.

Evolution is always complex – difficult to predict, best documented retrospectively – and the development of music that uses microtones is no exception. If this issue has an underlying editorial principle, it is that there is no one true path, either through the history of existing music or into the future of musicians' aspirations, and in compiling it I have deliberately drawn together authors whose views, while mostly complementary, are none the less divergent. In general, I have organized the contents of this volume in such a way that they trace a trajectory from the more broadly historical and theoretical towards the more practical and personal, although a similar trajectory is traced within the course of a number of the individual articles.

I have admired Daniel Wolf's work both as composer and theorist ever since we first met at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse in 1990 and his "Alternative Tunings, Alternative Tonalities" offers a characteristically thorough overview of many different microtonal musics. This necessarily overlaps with Bob Gilmore's "Climate Since Harry Partch", in which Gilmore extends the research project which yielded his acclaimed biography of Harry Partch into a consideration of the ways in which Partchian and Partch-like ideas have been explored by subsequent composers, both in America and in Europe.

All compositional activity is necessarily contingent on its realization and it is perhaps a paradox that most music using microtones has been written for realization on acoustic instruments designed with 12-tone equal temperament in mind and for performance by musicians trained to play in that temperament. Mieko Kanno, however, is ideally qualified to discuss how performers, and especially string players, deal with the intonational problems that confront them in tonal, atonal and microtonal music, since her own experience as a violinist ranges from performance on period instruments to the spectacularly accomplished interpretation of works such as Ferneyhough's *Intermedio alla ciaccona* which won her the Kranichsteinerpreis at the 1994 Darmstadt Ferienkurse.

After her "Thoughts on How to Play in Tune: Pitch and Intonation", an

unpretentious title (typical of its author) that belies the complexity of its historical and aesthetic debate of the issues surrounding performers' approaches to intonation, comes an account of a fundamentally empirical piece of research into quarter-tone intonation. Don Boustead was for a number of years one of my colleagues at the University of Huddersfield, UK, where he taught composition, and it was during that time that he established a deserved reputation for his ground-breaking work in developing a consistent system of microtonal fingerings for the recorder. His article describes an experiment in which he attempted to test whether his labours in developing both a fingering system and a series of richly contrapuntal compositions employing those fingerings yielded the aural results he expected.

The final three articles are perhaps more speculative. Livia Teodorescu-Ciocanea is one of Romania's leading younger composers, and her discussion of "Timbre versus Spectralism" has a strongly Romanian flavour. The article has been developed from the commentary that accompanied a composition folio submitted for a PhD undertaken jointly between the National University of Music, Bucharest, and the University of Huddersfield, and I am grateful to Livia Teodorescu-Ciocanea's external examiner, Nigel Osborne, for proposing this development and to Margaret Lucy Wilkins for assisting her in preparing the paper for publication. The Romanian theme continues with Bob Gilmore's interview with the Romanian *émigré* Horatiu Radulescu, perhaps the most complete portrait of this visionary composer yet published in English. In conclusion, my own article offers an unashamedly personal history of a journey into a coherent yet hybrid microtonal music.

Acknowledgements

I am enormously grateful to all the contributors to this issue for the efficiency with which they delivered their work. I must also thank my colleagues in the Music Department at the University of Huddersfield, UK, for allowing me a period of sabbatical leave during which I was able to complete my work on this issue of the journal. My son Ben lent me his lap-top at a crucial stage in the final preparations, for which many thanks; and, as always, I owe a special debt to my partner in life, Susanna Eastburn, who creates the climate in which my work thrives.

Reference

Tenney, James (1984) "John Cage and the Theory of Harmony". In *Soundings 13: The Music of James Tenney*, ed. P. Garland, pp. 55–83. Santa Fe, NM: Soundings Press.

Copyright of Contemporary Music Review is the property of Routledge, Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of Contemporary Music Review is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.