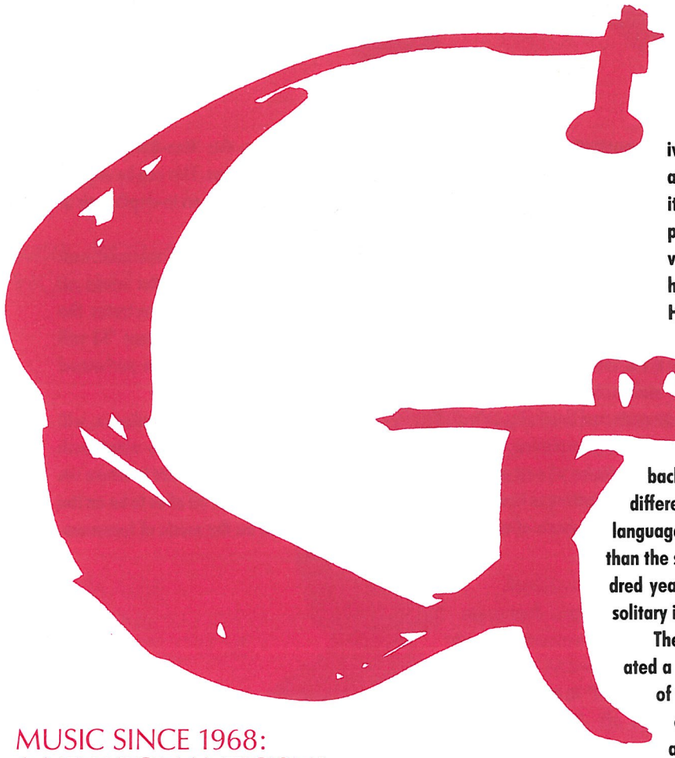
This commemorative magazine was made possible in part by a generous gift from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).

ORIZONS '83

SINCE 1968,
A NEW
ROMANTICISM?

JACOB DRUCKMAN,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



MUSIC SINCE 1968: A NEW ROMANTICISM?

JACOB DRUCKMAN

Given the enormous profusion of different styles and aesthetics that abound in music today, we might be led to believe that the possibility of viewing its history as a succession of more or less conjunct periods is gone forever. There are even those that argue that the very notion of musical periods was always artificial, an invention of historians superimposed on a simple succession of individual voices. However, we have only to remember that expressions such as *Ars nova, Stile rappresentativo* and *Style galant* were contemporaneous with the music they described and represent their composers' recognition of major shifts in the musical thinking of the time.

Certainly each composer has his or her own voice. As far back as the Renaissance there was a real appreciation for the subtle differences among individual personalities working within the common language of their society. At that time the differences were less apparent than the similarities, but that balance began to change. In the last two hundred years, there has been an increasing celebration of the individual as solitary iconoclast.

The great burgeoning of musical talent in the nineteenth century created a modern tower of Babel and caused the almost total abandonment of the notion of common language. This has continued in our century, compounded by the increasing speed of communication of ideas, and has lead to an ever increasing diversity and a constant acceleration of technical and aesthetic change.

Nonetheless, there is a steady underlying rhythm. Just as the surface of the seas can be agitated by storms and smoothed by doldrums while there is a cosmic tide that moves from one pole to another, undisturbed by momentary tempests, so there is a rhythm in the progress of the arts that moves from one pole to another. This great and steady shift seems to happen repeatedly between two distinctly different artistic climates. On the one hand there is the Apollonian, the Classical—logical, rational, chaste and explainable; and on the other hand, the Dionysian, the Romantic—sensual, mysterious, ecstatic, transcending the explainable.

That tide turned twice during the twentieth century. The first time was during the years immediately following the First World War. The most obvious example was Stravinsky, the composer of the savage and primal *Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces* who dismayed his new disciples by suddenly turning around and adapting the harmonies, gestures and forms of the early eighteenth century. (Of course, it can be argued that looking back is, a priori, a nostalgic and therefore romantic notion, but there are different ways of looking back. To bathe oneself in nostalgia is certainly romantic but to reach back for structure and form, or even just the air of respectability, is classical.) A less obvious example of the advent of the new Classicism was Schoenberg. By the time of the war his atonal music had reached the heights of its super-romantic Expressionism, freely flowing in its almost Freudian stream-of-consciousness and Gothic way. At this moment, Schoenberg suddenly stopped composing. When he emerged from his seven-year silence he came out with, not a new music, but the same atonality; however, now it was ordered and contained by his "method of composing with the 12 tones." His first completely twelve-tone work (Opus 25a) is even set in the form of a Baroque dance suite!

Similarly, Bartok's music changed during those same years. While there is not such a clear demarcation as exists with Schoenberg and Stravinsky, there is nonetheless an observable change from the wild Expressionism and Gothic subject matter of the early works (*Miraculous Mandarin, Bluebeard's Castle*), to the neat and orderly fugues, sonata-allegro forms and general formalism of the last two decades of his life.

The continued swing toward Neo-Classicism was obvious with most of the composers of the post-World War I generation. The music of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland, Harris, Schuman, Hindemith et al., was clearly based on the forms and symmetries of earlier music. However, if we expand our idea of Neo-Classicism to include that music which broke with the past but still was focused primarily on order and rationality, we can see that Webern and the post-World War II, "post-Webern generation" constituted the apogee of the tidal shift toward the Apollonian. Because this is such recent history, it is rather difficult to think of the music of Boulez, Babbitt, Xenakis and Carter as being related to Neo-Classicism, but if we step back a bit and consider the primary goals of these composers we can see that they present the quintessential statement of those Apollonian ideals; that the center of this "post-Webern" thinking was an elevation of rationalism to unprecedented heights.

During the mid-1960s the tide began to change. Even though new works and new ideas continue to pour out at break-neck speed, we can sense a gradual change of focus, of spirituality and of goals.

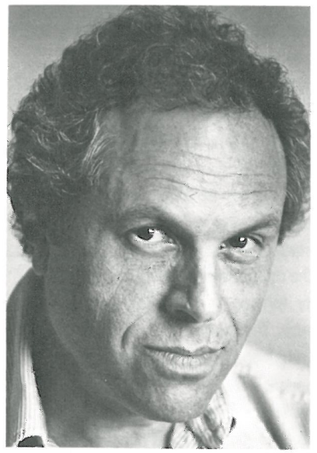
No matter how varied the surface of these musics are, one can discern a steady re-emergence of those Dionysian qualities: sensuality, mystery, nostalgia, ecstasy, transcendency. Whether this new music will be called "Neo-Romanticism" or some other term is yet to be seen, but whatever its name, it is this new music which is the subject of our festival.

There are many parallels to be drawn between the last two decades and the emergence of Romanticism in the 1830s and '40s. The strong but unfocused revolutionary spirit which gripped Europe in the post-Napoleonic years certainly seems to have been reflected in the student uprisings in the late 1960s in the United States, France and Germany. After the disappointments of the culmination of the "Age of Reason" in the nineteenth century and the post-war "cybernetic age" of the twentieth, there seem to have been parallel reachings out to a transcendent state that took many forms. In both centuries there was an intensification of interest in traditional religion as well as new or "exotic" spirituality; in drugs; in the unseen world. (Compare Coleridge and Poe in the nineteenth century with the flower-children of San Francisco in the twentieth; and the dream world of the *Symphonie fantastique* with the hypnotic music of Riley, Subotnick or Reich.)

One of the earliest signs of the new aesthetic in the 1960s was the music of the eastern European avant-garde. Penderecki, Lutoslawski and Ligeti were moving away from an intellectual orientation toward an acoustic sensuality. The poignant nostalgia of Berio's *Sinfonia* was a masterful example of the general tendency to reach backwards and forwards simultaneously. In Japan, Takemitsu, and in the United States, Crumb, and later Schwantner and Levinson, were leading us into a mysterious and fragrant garden of dreams. Even Stockhausen was talking about the "Age of Aquarius!"

On and on, so many examples—too many and too close to know where it's all heading. There are also too many contradictions. (How does the music of Cage, Brown and Feldman fit into this picture?) Wherever we are going, we know we are in an era of fascinating change. Once again the scent of Byron's "Western Wind" is in the air.

'A GREAT AND STEADY SHIFT SEEMS TO HAPPEN REPEATEDLY BETWEEN TWO DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT ARTISTIC CLIMATES: THE APOLLONIAN AND THE DIONYSIAN.'



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