# *REPORT FROM YALE: Festival of Contemporary American Music*

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FROM MAY 14 TO 21 THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR Contemporary Music, in cooperation with the Yale University School of Music, presented a festival of contemporary American music. Although the first concert-discussion paid tribute to Aaron Copland and Roger Sessions, the bulk of the events were dedicated to Milton Babbitt of Princeton University who celebrated his 50th birthday. The concert given on May 20 featured "The New Generation in New Haven;" the concert on May 21 was devoted to Babbitt's music and to works dedicated to him. Some of the works from these programs will be mentioned below as they relate to the real subject of this report: the seminars on computers and notation.

The first seminar, entitled "Computers and New Music," consisted of a keynote address by Lejaren Hiller ("A Review of the First Decade") and a panel discussion including Milton Babbitt, J. K. Randall, James Tenney, and Hiller. The moderator was Mel Powell.

Hiller divided his address into four main areas: input and output systems, musicology and analysis, composition, and synthesis. Those who have followed the literature in this field—from Hiller and Issacson's *Experimental Music* (1956) to Hiller and Bean's "Information Theory Analysis of Four Sonata Expositions," *Journal of Music Theory* (1966)—need not have attended this session. Hiller presented a sketchy summary of standard topics: storage and retrieval, machine and compiling languages, and music printing via computer-typewriter and photo-readers. He referred to work being done by Michael Kassler at Princeton (computerized Schenkerian analysis) and by Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg at Columbia (computerized scanning device) but failed to give any details concerning this work. With regard to his own projects it must be concluded that his limitations as a musicologist have prevented him from posing significant questions. The panel agreed that theorists and musicologists have not

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kept pace with technological advances (the work reported in the current issue of the *Journal of Music Theory* was done over six years ago).

Hiller moved from the above topics to the use of the computer in composition by stating that he considers himself a composer rather than a theorist or engineer. Hiller was a pioneer of sorts with the *Illiac Suite* (1956),[1] and it was disappointing to see that very little had been learned since that early experiment. Hiller himself was forced to admit that the fifteen or so computer-composed works were "rather simple-minded." More distressing than the music itself was the attitude of gamesmanship Hiller displays towards music. In composing part of the *Computer Cantata*, Hiller thought it would be amusing to employ the same parametric specifications as Charles Ives did in *Three Places in New England*. Within these specifications the pitches, etc., were randomly selected by the computer. Hiller is presently writing a piece "just for the fun of it" where probabilities are based on gas velocities.

J. K. Randall of Princeton began the panel discussion by playing samples of music composed under the Music IVB project. There is no comparison between the work being done at Illinois and that being done at Princeton. The latter has serious musical intentions and seems to be overcoming the difficulties initially encountered. These are pieces which "use the computer as a performer and not as a maker of compositional choices." As Milton Babbitt indicated later, there are certain problems in not being able to hear the piece until the punched cards have been run through a digital to analogue converter. Nevertheless, the efforts show promise, and one can only hope that eventually the composers from Princeton will be able to play more than "works in progress."

James Tenney has been working in much the same area as Hiller; his music is computer-composed but performed by the machine as well. Tenney works with broadly-conceived structures in which the detail is randomly generated by the computer. The results are tedious and sound like a cross between *Fontana Mix* and some early experiments in a conventional tape studio. The presentation on the previous evening of Bulent Arel's *Stereo Electronic Music No. 1*, which followed Tenney's *Ergodos II*, led one to suspect that at the present time the best electronic music is still being composed in the tape studio.

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[1]See my discussion of this work in "Aesthetic Direction in Electronic Music," *Western Humanities Review*, Autumn 1964.

Milton Babbitt spoke very briefly but was able to put the entire subject of electronic music into useful perspective. He suggested that the lack of evidence in the fields of psycho-acoustics and sound perception has handicapped many of the composers now using computers. It is impossible to quarrel with this statement after having heard the work of Tenney and Hiller.

The keynote address of the seminar on "New Music Notation" was given by Kurt Stone and was entitled "Symbology: Forms and Purposes." The remarks were centered around two general questions: why do today's composers feel a need for new notation, and what are the present trends in notation? Stone felt obliged to offer a brief history of musical notation in Western civilization to support the time-honored cliché that no upheaval in the last 1500 years is comparable to our own. No one can deny the complexity of today's notation, but some of the performers who participated in the festival felt that composers and performers alike have been able to adapt the notation of common practice to suit their needs and that radical departures in notation often create more problems than they solve.

Stone offered several specific objections to the standard notation: (1) Staff notation is modal and not intervallic in conception and thus hampers the recognition of novel pitch relations. (2) Arithmetic rather than geometric progressions must be developed to indicate rhythmic relationships. (3) We have no way to effect a really controlled *ritardando* or *accelerando*. (4) There is no way of notating simultaneous rhythms. Stone is incorrect with regard to the last two points. The invention of the *polynome* and *coordinome* by the composer Emmanuel Ghent has demonstrated a simple and ingenious solution to these difficulties. It is ironic that composers have not turned to electronic devices to solve problems of performance when they have been relying on machines to create their music for the past twenty years.

In his discussion of today's trends in notation, Stone showed slides and provided brief explanations of the following published scores: Carter's *String Quartet* (1959), Berio's *Sequenza* (1959), Brown's *Hodograph I* (1958) and *Available Forms I* (1961), Stockhausen's *Refrain* and Haubenstock-Romati's *Decisions*. Many of these scores are examples of semichance music and led Stone to question whether notation hasn't become an end in itself or a vehicle to awaken the performer's curiosity.

A panel discussion followed the address and was moderated by George Perle. George Crumb discussed his score for *Night Music I*

and played two different performances of the third movement. He spoke of his desire to achieve a "controlled chance" or "multiple choice" situation and indicated a concern for horizontal logic, leaving vertical relationships to coincidence. Composer Donald Martino spoke about the score of his *Parisonatina Al' Dodecafonia* (magnificently performed the previous evening by the cellist Aldo Parisot). The score employs three colors to indicate *pizzicato*, *col legno*, and a special effect of tapping on the body of the instrument. Martino said he was appalled by the permissiveness of performers which should be corrected by spelling out every nuance desired by the composer. If the composer genuinely wants extreme latitude in performance, scores like those of Cage and Berio are perfectly acceptable. Babbitt took issue with his pupil, Martino, by pointing out that permissiveness is often the result of specifications that cannot be realized in performance. To illustrate this, Babbitt played three distinct rhythmic patterns which in a synthesized performance sounded nearly alike. Babbitt concluded with a complex discussion of acoustical phenomena and their relation to scores of electronic music.

These were important meetings and would have been of great value to musicologists. It is unfortunate that the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society had its largest meeting scheduled for the same day. The audience was further limited by the parochialism of the festival directors. Why were nearly two-thirds of the festival patrons on the staff of the Yale School of Music? Why was the May 20 concert called "The New Generation in New Haven" when the majority of the compositions came from locations outside New Haven and three of the six composers received their training abroad? Perhaps this was Yale's protest against the Columbia and Buffalo groups for contemporary music. Finally, the festival was so poorly publicized that very few "outsiders" were able to experience the irregularities of the New Haven Railroad.