

Looking at trends in modern music, over the last few decades, it's clear that the music known as *Avant Garde* has all but faded from the music scene. Even the serialists of the 50s, 60s and the 70s, and those influenced by them, have all but stopped composing twelve tone music and have made the transition to a more tonal music. Most likely because of the academic world's focus on serial music, as part of their Ph. D programs for composers (started by *Milton Babbitt* at Princeton), a resistance by many to that trend began to grow.

From that emerged the minimalists who used subtle variations and repetition within a mostly tonal environment, resulting in a more audience-friendly music that, for many, became their chosen musical language. *Philip Glass's Einstein on the Beach* was widely praised, even though it was simple and uncomplicated. Some returned to tonality that was more reminiscent of neo-classical and even neo-romantic. Many used what they referred to as "quotations", where they added bits and pieces of classical works into their own compositions.

A noteworthy example of that was *George Rochberg*, once a prominent serial composer who abruptly changed to tonality. His reason, according to *Richard Taruskin*, was because he couldn't find the level of expressionism in serial music that he got from tonal music. It also had to do with audiences generally rejecting the Avant Garde and preferring the less adventurous, less demanding neo-classical, neo-romantic. Gone was music inspired by *John Cage* and *Morton Feldman*, *Pierre Boulez* and *Karlheinz Stockhausen*, and even *La Monte Young* and *Terry Riley*, who enjoyed a surge in popularity in the 60s and 70s.

In my opinion, the demands for composing music that would be played more often and appreciated by more general audiences, drove composers into that direction. If they attempted to earn at least part of their income from writing music, that was essential. If no one plays or listens to your music, you aren't making any

money. It was more a matter of financial survival, rather than artistic or esthetic motivation. Reading the many treatises by musicologists, you most likely won't see that reasoning spelled out. But I think that's at the core of it all.

Even *Milton Babbitt* realized that serial music was for the "specialist" and, thanks to academia, the serial composer would have a safe environment to pursue that more challenging music within a university-sponsored world. If he or she ventured into the outside world, where competition was intense and public demand was a strong factor, they'd have acquiesced to a more playable, listenable music, if they wanted to make a go of it. You have to be prepared to pursue your art as an independent. That means you have to be able to support yourself by other means.

A couple of examples are *Charles Ives* and *Elliot Carter*. Ives made his fortune in the insurance business. Carter inherited his father's fortune from his lace importing business. Both were free to pursue the music they wanted to write without worrying if the bills would get paid. That's a huge load off of one's mind and definitely frees one up to pursue a musical path that may not be all that popular. Without the need to make a living writing music and, therefore writing music that pandered to those who would enable that living to be made, one could follow whatever path he or she chose.

Thanks in large part to events that occurred at IRCAM in the early 1980s, and in spite of *Pierre Boulez's* strong objections, others within IRCAM pursued acquiring personal computers and synthesizers, to be used as vehicles for composing and realizing the resulting music. It turned out to be what saved IRCAM for the future, and gave the rest of us new tools to work with. My own experience in the 1990s exemplified this. With the right hardware and software, one could compose and playback their music without the need for anyone or anything else.

Today, with the vast reach and virtually unlimited potential of the internet, many composers have established a presence in this virtual online community, and many have gained prominence and acceptance. The product of their composing efforts is more often an audio file or a CD recording, rather than a score in search of an orchestra to play it. Musicians who do perform these works do so because they've become devotees of new music and seek it out to perform. It's usually at much smaller venues, however, with little hope for a performance at the more established and potentially lucrative, orchestra venues.

Being a part of the online composer community, and not being dependent on composing as a source of one's earnings, gives one an independence to follow their own path, and write what they want. In a lot of cases where composers did this, they gained acceptance and awareness, often leading to being offered posts teaching. A good example is *Brian Ferneyhough*. But before they got to that point, they needed to earn a living somehow. In any event, getting to that point is a slippery slope to climb and most don't make it.

I have made use of computers and software for a number of years now, making that transition from pen and paper and a keyboard in composing my music. Once I made that transition there was no turning back. The old paradigm that said I must score a piece then get someone to play it no longer was a requirement. I could employ a virtual orchestra, through the many high-quality samples available as software, and direct my notation program to use these sample. I then finalize what results by doing some audio engineering, again using software, to create a studio-like mix ready for publishing online.

By controlling all the parameters of the music creation process, I get the result I want, the way I want it. That's huge, as far as I'm concerned. I've established a presence through my website, where I offer my music as audio files, my scores as PDF files, and

other aspects of my creative efforts, like photos, videos and writings. I have a modest following and I'm quite satisfied with that. Mostly, I satisfy my own aesthetic sense and creativity. I do it first and foremost for me. If others find my work worthy and want to listen to my audio files, or read my scores, that's great.

It all comes down to whether or not you want to pursue a career in music, whereby you earn a living from it. You need to be prepared for more lean times than prosperous times. It's very competitive and there's so much talent out there vying for the handful of opportunities. You need to be ready for what's coming if you choose that path. For me, I chose to not earn anything with my music. I worked at other things my whole life and now am retired. I don't need to earn money with my music, so I still write what I want.

I continue to pursue a more Avant Garde kind of music. I still use aspects of serialism, electronic, and all other kinds of sounds in my work. I believe my work still bears my signature sound regardless of what resources I use to compose with. Ultimately, you create your own sound, your own style. When you control more of the processes that go into producing that sound, the more it reflects you and who you are as an artist.

I disagree with *John Cage* and those that would remove themselves for the composing process. I'd rather liberate the sounds than the composer or the musicians that may play them. It's my choice to compose, and maintaining my autonomy in doing so is my right as an artist. Having the capability to control the entire process allows me to confidently offer my music for listening by anyone who wants to. I'm quite happy with that. So, for me, the Avant Garde is still relative today, even though much of it has become passé. Sometimes what's old is new again.