

a wide-ranging presentation of rock's fundamental elements compiled lovingly by a committed scholar with deep knowledge of the repertory.

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Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents. By Felix Meyer and Anne C. Shreffler. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Paul Sacher Foundation and Boydell Press, 2008.

Amid the wealth of new materials made available to the scholarly community in connection with Elliott Carter's centenary year is *Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents*, by Felix Meyer, director of the Paul Sacher Foundation, and Anne C. Shreffler, Professor of Music at Harvard University.¹ The stated purpose of this elegant volume is to survey Carter's career and working methods. The publication of this collection of documents will also certainly serve to alleviate (rather than "remedy," as the authors propose in their introduction) the lack of accessibility to Carter's autograph materials, the bulk of which have been held at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, Switzerland, which does not have a published catalog of its holdings. Thus, this book will provide scholars and students with a highly valuable resource in preparing for the study of archival materials and might also encourage others to take advantage of several hundred pages of sketches for fifteen works, from *Pocahontas* (1939?) to the Double Concerto (1961), recently made available online by the Library of Congress.²

With a total of 195 reproduced items, the book stands as the most comprehensive study of primary sources relating to Carter's compositional career to date.³ These materials fall into four categories: (1) a relatively small selection of photographs (about thirty-five); (2) diplomatic transcriptions of eighty-five letters to and from Carter (a relatively small number when compared to the Sacher Foundation's

¹ Shreffler's contributions to Carter scholarship include "Elliott Carter and His America," *Sonus* 14/2 (Spring 1994): 38–66, as well as two analytical studies of Carter's vocal music, "'Give the Music Room': Elliott Carter's 'View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress' aus *A Mirror on Which to Dwell*," in *Quellenstudien II: Zwölf Komponisten des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Felix Meyer (Winterthur: Amadeus Verlag, 1993), 255–83, and "Instrumental Dramaturgy as Humane Comedy: *What Next?*" by Elliott Carter and Paul Griffiths," in *Musiktheater heute: Internationales Symposium der Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel 2001*, ed. Hermann Danuser (Mainz: Schott, 2003), 147–71.

² These materials are part of the Holograph Music Manuscripts of Elliott Carter (1932–71), Music Division, Library of Congress; see Elliott Carter Manuscripts, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/search?query=%2BmemberOf:carter&start=0&view=thumbnail&sort=titlesort&label=Elliott%20Carter%20Manuscripts>.

³ Two sources based on an extensive study of these materials deserve mention: David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 2nd. ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Max Noubel, *Elliott Carter, ou Le temps fertile* (Geneva: Contrechamps, 2000).

holdings, which include about 10,000); (3) diplomatic transcriptions of eighteen articles, lectures, and interviews, most of which were previously unpublished; and (4) sixty-five high-quality facsimiles of sketches and music manuscripts selected from more than fifty different works, ranging from *My Love Is in a Light Attire* (an unpublished work from 1928) to *Sound Fields* (2007).⁴ The volume also includes two appendices: (1) English translations of letters in French, German, and Italian and (2) a list of published works, from *Tarantella* (1936) to *On Conversing with Paradise* (2008). The first category includes family photographs (those who know of Carter's fascination with automobiles will enjoy a picture of him as a young boy in the family's Cadillac, ca. 1916), rehearsal pictures, and photographs of Carter with figures such as Milton Babbitt, Luciano Berio, and Carl Ruggles. Letters are generally presented in pairs and include both Carter's and his correspondents', among which are fellow composers, writers with whom the composer collaborated, conductors, editors, performers, and patrons. Of note among the third category are a 1957 essay titled "Sound and Silence in Time" and a 1961 essay titled "Extending the Classical Syntax," both of which provide further insights into the composer's musical thinking and the ways in which it interacts with contemporaneous musical aesthetics, such as serialism, minimalism, and "open-ended" music, of which Carter is especially critical. Carter sheds light on his position in a 1973 interview (with Stuart Liebman of the *Boston Phoenix*): "I see the motion of music as a kind of analogue to the processes of our inner life. It must present not merely patterns of feeling, but also the patterns of logical thought and of the stream-of-consciousness" (216). His critique is put into action a few years later in a passage from *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1976; also reproduced in this volume), where the mechanistic writing suggests "the cessation of poetic impulse" (227). The selection of music manuscripts is varied in terms of both genres and types of documents. Genres represented include choral music (from *Heart Not So Heavy as Mine* to *Mad Regales*), incidental and ballet music (*Philoctetes*, *The Minotaur*, *Pocahontas*), works for orchestra (from *Symphony No. 1* to *Soundings*), concertos (including those for oboe, violin, and clarinet), chamber music with and without voice, solo instrumental works (*Night Fantasies* for piano, *Inner Song* for oboe from *Trilogy*, *Steep Steps* for bass clarinet), and opera. The types of autograph materials represented in this volume range from verbal notes and sketches or drafts in pencil to short and full score drafts in pencil or ink, photostat full scores, proofs of first editions, and printed editions with or without autograph corrections. There are also a few instances of unpublished works and discarded materials, such as the Sonata for Two Pianos (ca. 1955–56), a work that had been commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress and is documented by two folders of sketches (about forty-two pages). Another interesting example is the subsection titled "Prequel to *What Next?* (2001)," which presents a two-layered libretto by Paul Griffiths based on a story involving an apocalyptic suicide cult that was to be realized by the composer as a

⁴ Before the publication of the present volume, Carter's writings had been made available in two collections: Else Stone and Kurt Stone, eds., *The Writings of Elliott Carter* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); and Jonathan W. Bernard, ed., *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937–1995* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1997).

polyphonic/polyrhythmic setting throughout (in contrast to the mostly disjointed or overlapping solo lines of *What Next?*). Other materials include samples of pre-compositional materials, such as the polyrhythmic graph for *Esprit rude/Esprit doux I*, a chart of the pitch materials and tempo fluctuations for the Concerto for Orchestra (complementing previously published facsimiles in *Settling New Scores*), and analytical graphs such as a music example for an analysis of the Piano Sonata sent to Edgard Varèse and a rhythm chart for the opening of the Double Concerto prepared to accompany Carter's article "The Orchestral Composer's Point of View" (1970). A few sketches also attest to the composer's working method of assembling a score from fragments (e.g., *Night Fantasies* and *A Mirror on Which to Dwell*). Unfortunately, only a few documents provide information on Carter's interaction with performers. Of note is an annotated photocopy of a previous version of the last three bars of *Steep Steps* for bass clarinet (2001), which was sent to the piece's dedicatee, Virgil Blackwell, to get his feedback before making the final version, and a fax exchange with the dramaturge Micaela von Marcard, in which Carter gives detailed suggestions on the performance of Rose's part in *What Next?* Nevertheless, a more representative survey of Carter's interaction with performers will have to await a multimedia publication.

The book is organized chronologically into eight chapters, and each chapter is subdivided into subsections containing related materials that are accompanied by insightful commentaries, which are nonetheless necessarily limited in depth. Although the volume does not include a bibliography, the authors offer abundant cross-references (often including the corresponding bar numbers of discussed passages in the final score) and display an impressive knowledge of both primary and secondary sources.⁵ However, many readers will be disappointed to find that a descriptive list of the materials has not been included—a serious oversight given the most likely readership.

The article-length introduction situates Carter within the cultural and political context of U.S. and European music making in the past century. The main contribution of the two authors is to reject claims of Eurocentrism made by scholars such as Richard Taruskin and Kyle Gann, and to present Carter's aesthetic of "radical traditionalism" as having been influenced by the transnational spirit of the pre-World War II United States and the New York Intellectuals' vision of a "cosmopolitan modernism" (6). The first chapter focuses on Carter's education, the beginnings of his relationship with Charles Ives, early compositional efforts, and training in Paris. In the short commentary accompanying the facsimile of a sample of Carter's counterpoint exercises from the 1930s with Nadia Boulanger (with annotations by the master), we learn that Carter took about 100 weekly counterpoint lessons, a dedication that few of us can expect of any undergraduate or graduate student today. The second chapter (from 1935 to 1947) presents the earliest published works, many of which could be associated with neoclassicism, either in their form (e.g., Symphony No. 1 and the unfinished Sonatina for Oboe and Harpsichord) or in

⁵ More avid readers will want to refer to John F. Link, *Elliott Carter: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), and Carter's own *Harmony Book*, ed. Nicholas Hopkins and John F. Link (New York: Carl Fischer, 2002).

their subject matter (e.g., *The Minotaur*). Other works attest to Carter's experience with singing groups (*Heart Not So Heavy as Mine* and *The Defense of Corinth*, his second work written for the Harvard Glee Club). Finally, the next chapter marks a period fertile in works for chamber ensemble and the larger Variations for Orchestra (1955), which took up most of the composer's efforts during his residence in Rome after having won the American Prix de Rome in 1953.

By contrast, from 1956 to 1962, Carter published only two works (the String Quartet No. 2 and the Double Concerto). This drop in productivity was probably partly due to the relative complexity of the two works, especially in terms of their polyrhythmic construction (represented by the ten-part rhythm chart provided for the opening of the Double Concerto), and several teaching engagements. Yet the collection of letters and essays show a composer very much intent on solving musical problems in a personal way. Of note are two letter-exchanges with Italian composer Goffredo Petrassi. In the first, Petrassi reports on a performance of the Variations in Rome (1959), which he describes as "dix fois meilleure" ("ten times better") than an earlier New York performance. In the second, the composers discuss difficulties they are having with current compositions, Carter sharing that he had no success in trying to use serial technique in the String Quartet No. 2. Carter's intense involvement with musical problem solving is also represented in the fifth chapter through a collection of facsimiles from works such as the Piano Concerto (1961–65), Concerto for Orchestra (1967–69), and String Quartet No. 3 (1970–71), each of which was motivated by a fearless need for innovation. This chapter also presents many details about Carter's European travels and a group of letters testifying to his continued involvement with the American musical scene (e.g., letter exchange from May 1964 with Benjamin Boretz about a potential group of articles for *Perspectives of New Music* on pre-1930 U.S. avant-gardism, which would include composers such as Charles Ives, Charles Seeger, and Carl Ruggles, but also composers whom Boretz considered "forgotten," such as Leo Ornstein, Ruth Crawford, and Gunther Schuller).

In the period from 1974 to 1988, Carter's composing seems to have regained some momentum, starting with a series of works for voice and chamber ensemble. In particular, the discussion of *Syringa* (1977–78; with selected poems by John Ashbery) provides a glimpse of the composer's early efforts in working with structural polyrhythms in a more expressive manner, and the authors' commentary on the facsimile of a short score draft for the work points to Carter's laying out of the two vocal parts and their respective music-dramatic characteristics first, with the instrumental part present only in "skeletal" form. "Honors" here are attested to in part by another group of documents relating to Carter receiving the Ernst von Siemens Prize in 1981. Included in this group are Paul Sacher's letter to Carter (the latter's first contact with Sacher; beyond the honor of such a prestigious prize, the award included the sum of Sfr. 150,000), Carter's reply to Sacher, and his acceptance speech for the ceremony (originally delivered in German). The composer, who was nominated by Pierre Boulez, a former recipient (1979), was the first American-born musician to receive this prize. Of note here is also a previously unpublished interview at the Banff Center (1984), in which Carter reflects on teaching, Expressionism, and form as a social contract. Finally, the facility with which Carter seems to have kept on

producing works of uncommon vitality and sophistication in the last twenty years (noted by many other writers) is covered in the final two chapters of this volume, where we find a wide variety of works ranging in form from solo concertos and multimovement symphonic works to short (quasi-programmatic) instrumental pieces and the composer's first opera. Carter's ongoing experimentation with the mapping of his characteristically rhetorical gestures into formal processes, as well as with texture, is represented by *Mosaic* (2004) and *Sound Fields* (2007).

Although there were already a few sources available to analysts interested in working with Carter's musical sketches, none of them has the scope of *A Centennial Portrait*. Nonetheless, given the vignette-style organization of the publication, readers who wish to gain a general understanding of Carter's compositional method might be advised to refer to some of the other sources available.⁶ One aspect of Carter's compositional process that is revealed by the inclusion of facsimiles with colored markings is the composer's reliance on structural polyrhythms at several different levels. The presence of this device from the earliest stages of composition also suggests that it may be understood as an element of the composer's language that interacts with other musical elements throughout the various stages of realization. For example, the facsimile from the Clarinet Concerto (1996) shows a three-part rhythmic grid with contrasting subdivisions and beats; as is typical with Carter's stratification of the materials, each layer is also associated with specific intervals (as noted in the authors' description). Here the leading part is already written out and the orchestral parts are unevenly sketched in, with extended passages showing only the polyrhythmic attack patterns. Carter's annotations show that two of the most characteristic elements of his rhythmic language are intimately related: at the foreground level, attack patterns (every fourth triplet, third sixteenth, and third quintuplet sixteenth) can be activated to create multiple speeds, and at the background level, recurring slow pulsations ensure the unfolding of the work's underlying long-range polyrhythm (suggested here by three clarinet attacks circled in blue articulating a recurring time span of eighty-one quintuplet sixteenths, and circled time-points in the green pulse layer articulating a recurring time span of seventy-five sixteenths), which is often used to mark phrase and section boundaries. Similar processes can be observed in a few other facsimiles reproduced in the volume, including *Night Fantasies* (1978–80) and the Violin Concerto (1988–90).

The volume's selection of manuscript materials from Carter's vocal music output also attests to Carter's enduring (even if interrupted by a hiatus of more than

⁶ A good starting point is David Schiff, "A Paper Mountain: Elliott Carter's Sketches," and Jonathan W. Bernard, "Elliott Carter: Concerto for Orchestra (1965–69)," in *Settling New Scores: Music Manuscripts from the Paul Sacher Foundation*, ed. Felix Meyer (Mainz: Schott and Zurich: Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1998), 115–26. Another helpful resource is Vermaelen's more detailed discussion of Carter's precompositional methods and the various stages that may characterize the realization of a score such as that of "Anaphora" from *A Mirror on Which to Dwell*; see Denis Vermaelen, "Elliott Carter's Sketches: Spiritual Exercises and Craftsmanship," in *A Handbook to 20th-Century Musical Sketches*, ed. Patricia Hall and Friedemann Sallis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161–75.

twenty-five years) engagement with U.S. poets, from Emily Dickinson (*Heart Not So Heavy as Mine*, 1938), Hart Crane (*Voyage*, 1943), Mark Van Doren (*The Harmony of Morning*, 1944), and Allen Tate (*Emblems*, 1947), to Elizabeth Bishop (*A Mirror on Which to Dwell*, 1975), John Ashbery (*Syringa*, 1978, and *Mad Regales*, 2007), and Robert Lowell (*In Sleep, in Thunder*, 1981). These manuscripts also reveal two other aspects of Carter's characteristic working methods: a tendency to lay out the leading part first and the strong contrapuntal nature of the interaction between the solo voice and the instrumental accompaniment, initially presented as a continuous line that is then divided between two or more instruments (as with the discarded "Across the Yard" for *In Sleep, in Thunder*), or as a polyrhythmic grid adorned by a few characteristic gestures. Some of the reproduced documents, such as a 1944 letter to John Kirkpatrick that was accompanied by a detailed analysis of Crane's poem "Voyage," demonstrate the intensity with which Carter tackled issues of text setting as well as his serious consideration of the interaction between poetry and music. Another interesting document that speaks to Carter's thoughts on text setting is a lecture-essay titled "The Need for New Choral Music" (1953), in which Carter discusses a project he has envisioned for a large choral setting of Hart Crane's poem *The Bridge*, a project that was never completed, although the text was to be used later as inspiration for *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1976). In the lecture, Carter expresses his unwillingness to simplify his language in the way he feels it is necessary to do in order to accommodate choral societies (which were then largely made up of amateur musicians). In fact, after *Emblems* (1946–47) he did not write again for vocal ensemble until *Mad Regales* (2007). Yet other facsimiles testify to the importance Carter attributes to the clear association of musical materials and dramatic character. For example, sketches in pencil for *What Next?* ("ideas for soprano, July 12, 1997") show various melodic ideas associated with different emotions or characters such as "anger," "lyrical," "ecstatic," "tender," "ironic," "comic," and "tragic/heroic" (304–305). Finally, some will find the discarded materials to be of special interest, as they often point to the essential character of elements within the composition that may have changed form in the course of the realization. For example, sketches for Robert Lowell's poem "Across the Yard" for *In Sleep, in Thunder* (1980–81) present an earlier draft of the vocal line that is very close to the final version. In contrast, the trumpet part, which is standing in for the poem's subject, "an aging and out-of-work soprano" who is vocalizing tirelessly, presents itself very differently (the continuous line presented here was also later divided between the trumpet and alto flute), although it already exhibits an "extravagant" character, which was later emphasized by using smaller subdivisions. The authors also point out that Carter often writes verbal notes about the character of the materials needed to fill in the texture, for example, "add (1) reverb! and (2) trash-noise" (247).

As we have seen, the large selection of documents, most of which were previously unpublished, provide much insight into the composer's views on a variety of topics (musical and extra-musical). Many of the letters addressed to Carter include reports on performances of his works and are thus very interesting for reception studies. The elegant volume will also appeal to a wide audience, including performing musicians, concert goers, and cultural historians, all of whom might be curious

about Carter's contribution to U.S. musical life in the last century, as well as his interaction with notable figures such as Nicolas Nabokov and Sir William Glock, to name a few. Given the wealth of archival materials available and the difficulty of keeping up with a century-old composer who is still actively engaged in his art, this volume is a considerable achievement and is likely to find its place in most libraries and on the shelves of many Carter enthusiasts.

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