

13 | Serialism in Canada and the United States

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No one ever imagined serialism would thrive in Canada and the United States. Before the Second World War, the majority of American and Canadian composers saw it as a distinctly Austro-German phenomenon – the epitome of the dominant cultural force that they were trying to ‘get out from under’, as Aaron Copland famously said (Cone 1971a: 141). A small handful of composers experimented with it, after exposure to the music of the Second Viennese School and interactions with its members’ students. Yet serialism was at first a European trend of marginal influence in the United States and Canada. It was thus surprising to many when it rose to significant prominence after the Second World War, flowering over subsequent decades to produce artistic innovations of remarkable variety.

From the beginning, serialism developed rather differently in Canada and the United States than it did in Europe. In these two countries, ‘serial’ has denoted an array of approaches, all involving a fixed series of pitches or other musical elements, which may or may not show a debt to Schoenberg’s methods. Indeed, American and Canadian serialism has been significantly shaped by the different institutional, ideological, and cultural contexts in which composers lived and worked on the North American continent. In the first half of the twentieth century, Canadian and American composers were still working to break out of national and global obscurity. Keen as ever to keep up with European developments, their early (and limited) experiments with Schoenberg’s method of composing with twelve tones were highly idiosyncratic, shaped by the values of American individualism, the heightened commitment to creating a national music, and the idea of a uniquely American trajectory of modernism, centring around a movement known as ultramodernism. During the Second World War, with the arrival of celebrated serialist émigrés including Arnold Schoenberg and Ernst Krenek, the United States especially became an important safe haven (along with the United Kingdom) for a rejected and persecuted Austro-German serial

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tradition. After the war, as European countries began rebuilding their devastated infrastructures, economies, and arts communities, the United States and Canada enjoyed comparative stability and wealth. European composers may have believed their music – like their architecture, infrastructure, and social structures – needed to be rebuilt from scratch at ‘zero hour’; American and Canadian composers did not face anything like the same existential, economic, or ideological challenge. Rather, many were able to thrive in well-funded university music departments that were often welcoming to serial innovations. Yet this is not to say the American and Canadian music scenes were unaffected by ideology or politics. In the early 1950s, the burgeoning Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began to create a distinct and challenging environment for composers, especially in the United States, where anti-Communism was particularly prevalent. This chapter tells the story of serialism in the United States and Canada against the background of these artistic, institutional, and ideological developments.

Serialism and Ultramodernism

The story of ultramodernism is an important chapter in the history of serialism in the United States and Canada, because of its influence on later serial composers. Yet it is important to note up front that its leading proponents saw their methods as distinct from serialism, which they associated (negatively) with the Old World and the past. The remarkable range of techniques and approaches utilised by composers such as Dane Rudhyar, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell, and Ruth Crawford during the 1920s and 1930s is radically – and deliberately – different from the contemporaneous work of the Second Viennese School, infused with distinctively spiritual and Americanist commitments.

It is only really possible to consider the ultramoderns as contributors to the history of serialism if we step away from a narrative history of serialism that defines its origins in Schoenbergian terms. Like the Second Viennese School, the ultramoderns were interested in finding new ways to organise dissonant material. But the approaches they developed, although also employing series, often functioned differently from the twelve-tone method. One significant outcome of their experiments, for example, was ‘dissonant counterpoint’, a method that ensured non-repetition of pitches and avoided consonant triads. Crawford in particular can be understood as a significant serial innovator for her creation of precompositional schemes

involving the application of systematic procedures of rotation and transposition to series of pitches (Straus 2009: 16).

Just as the ultramoderns' methods were different from the Europeans, so too was their aesthetic. Well aware that comparisons of American music to that from Europe were typically unfavourable, they tended to emphasise the differences between their approaches and those of Schoenberg and his colleagues, rather than the similarities (Oja 2000: 115). Cowell acknowledged that Ruggles's music had 'certain technical similarities' with Schoenberg's, for example, but said that while Schoenberg's music evoked 'a sophistication and a feeling of approaching decay', Ruggles's represented an 'exuberant upspringing' (Henry Cowell quoted in Oja 2000: 114). With such language, Cowell alludes to the markedly different social contexts in which the two groups were working. Ruggles and Rudhyar, meanwhile, felt that although Schoenberg looked 'well on paper', sonically his music was 'dry ... uninspired ... unsustainable' (letter from Ruggles to Rudhyar, quoted in Oja 2000: 114). The American ultramoderns' approach to systematising atonal writing certainly marks its own fascinating contribution to the history of serialism, if we understand the term in the broadest sense.

Not all early twentieth-century composers reacted negatively to Schoenberg, however, and his music did become influential for a small group of American composers between the wars. These musicians became aware of Schoenberg during concerts early in the century. In the 1910s, some leading US symphony orchestras performed his works, although usually to negative or indifferent reactions (Feisst 2011: 17–22). During the First World War, these negative responses strengthened as anti-German sentiment grew, because Schoenberg was so strongly associated with the development of German music, despite being Austrian. His music was, as a result, rarely heard in cities like New York during the war. This would change after the war's end, when interest picked up once again (Oja 2000: 49–50; Feisst 2011: 22–3).

Most histories cast Adolph Weiss as the first American composer to employ the twelve-tone method, following his return from studying with Schoenberg in Berlin and Vienna between 1925 and 1927. Joseph Straus has noted that Weiss's writings seem to demonstrate significant misunderstandings about Schoenberg's methods, suggesting Schoenberg may not have spent much of his teaching time discussing his own music (cf. Hicks 1990, 127). Nevertheless, Straus demonstrates, Weiss's own music does suggest he had grasped the central tenets of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method: Weiss's works use twelve-tone rows, combinatoriality, and symmetry, but his approach does not shy away from pitch repetition (Straus

2009: 3–7). Milton Babbitt, one of the leading post-war serialists, would claim in 1955 that Weiss's compositions and Wallingford Riegger's *Dichotomy* (1932–3) were the only truly serial American works written before Schoenberg arrived in the United States in 1933 (Babbitt 1955: 54). Riegger's work may well have been influenced by discussions with Weiss, with whom he worked at the Pan-American Association of Composers.

European Serialists in Exile

The Nazis' increasingly severe persecution of Jews and leftists, and their denotation of serial music as 'degenerate [*entartete*] music', brought a number of prominent European serialists to the United States as exiles. Canada did not receive the most famous serialists, although numerous Jewish musicians, music teachers, and professors migrated there from Europe before and during the war years. Schoenberg left Austria early in the Nazi period, arriving in the United States in 1933. Other leading serialists – Ernst Krenek, Stefan Wolpe, and Hanns Eisler – arrived in 1938. Each of these composers would take up a teaching post at an American higher education institution, where they shared their knowledge with a new generation of American composers. Krenek was particularly influential through his writings and lectures on contemporary compositional methods. All were profoundly altered, psychologically, by the experience of exile and migration, as well as by the Holocaust: their music often reflects this. Wolpe turned in the United States to working with 'pitch constellation', with his twelve-tone structures typically lying beneath the surface of his works. Krenek developed a new approach that fused twelve-tone and modal elements. Eisler wrote his *Deutscher Sinfonie* (1935–9) as an anti-fascist statement in his own tonally infused serial language, while Schoenberg channelled his emotional response to the Shoah into *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947). Schoenberg's style changed significantly in the United States, becoming more tonally influenced and more classical. These rather flexible approaches to serialism would help create a distinctly American take on serialism, for both US-born and immigrant composers.

Yet the influence of these European exiles upon American serialism was not always direct. Although many of Schoenberg's American students were successful, none became a leading serialist (Feisst 2011: 12). During the 1930s, immediately after Schoenberg's arrival, composers in the United States or Canada who were studying and experimenting with the twelve-tone

method were usually doing so in isolation. George Perle, for example, wrote a string quartet in 1938 based on private research into the method, although he would soon discover from Krenek that he had misunderstood some crucial aspects. Krenek praised the result, however, which helped shape the innovative alternative approach that Perle would later call twelve-tone tonality (Straus 2009: 56). In Canada, meanwhile, John Weinzweig wrote the first Canadian twelve-tone works in the late 1930s, after making a solo study of Schoenberg's music and the writings of his students while studying at the Eastman School of Music. He did this despite his professors' disdain for the method, one of whom, Weinzweig said, referred to Schoenberg as 'a perverted Jew', a troubling but certainly far from unique reflection of American antisemitism and its effect on Schoenberg's reception (Keillor 1994: 19). Weinzweig remained committed to the method on his return to Canada from the United States. As other Canadians began turning to serialism, he was increasingly held up as one of Canada's most important serialists, respected for his writings on the topic and his teachings as a professor at the University of Toronto (Nolan 2011).

Although the émigrés were not directly connected to these early North American serial composers, they were nevertheless influential, because they emboldened those interested in the avant-garde (Straus 2009: 27–8). Come the 1940s, a growing number of influential American- and Canadian-born composers were either utilising serialism or showing the influence of its techniques in their music, including Walter Piston (who wrote his first twelve-tone work, the *Chromatic Study on the Name of Bach*, in 1940), Milton Babbitt (whose first serial work was *Three Compositions for Piano* in 1947), and Elliott Carter. Babbitt has claimed that the presence of Schoenberg and his émigré colleagues on American soil actually helped American composers get over some of their anxiety of (European) influence. 'It was not merely that we could learn from the Schoenbergs and the Hindemiths and the Bartóks', he said. 'It was that suddenly we were no longer in any sense irreverently awed by them. We suddenly realised they had their failings' (Gagne and Caras 1982: 46). At the same time, American composers interested in serialism began to realise that they saw its possibilities quite differently than the new European arrivals. Although he and his colleagues were thrilled to meet and talk with European serialists, Babbitt wrote, the Europeans' use of 'phrases such as "historical necessity", even "inevitability", as justificatory were, for us, unfortunate, undesirable, and – beyond all else – unnecessary'. Babbitt has claimed that when he suggested there were potentialities to Schoenberg's methods that went beyond Schoenberg's own explorations, he was quickly 'banished from

the company of true believers' (Babbitt 1999: 41). The émigrés were a welcome addition to the American music scene for most composers. But American iconoclasts like Babbitt were not in awe of them. They already knew that serialism in the United States would go its own way.

A Post-War Flourishing

As interest in serial methods grew significantly amongst composers of both acoustic and electronic music at the beginning of the 1950s, it precipitated a reappraisal of early twentieth-century American ultramodernism. Elliott Carter, writing in the early 1960s, claimed that he and his colleagues found themselves looking anew at composers like Charles Ives, Cowell, and Ruggles, who had participated in the North American 'emancipation of the dissonance', but whose music had, he said, 'previously been considered meaningless' (Carter 1971: 217).

Two different approaches to serialism now arose at once. As Copland wrote in his autobiography, looking back at the late 1950s, 'It seemed to me at the time that the twelve-tone method was pointing in two opposite directions: toward the extreme of total organisation with electronic applications, and toward a gradual absorption into what had become a very freely interpreted tonalism' (Copland and Perlis 1989: 242). Babbitt was the leading proponent of the former attitude, leading the charge to systematise serial applications and serialising musical elements other than pitch. The technological capabilities of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center's cutting-edge Mark II synthesizer significantly enhanced his experiments. The result was a serial output that differed significantly from that of Schoenberg or Webern. Babbitt's music is highly original, utilising arrays of combinatorial sets, scattered across registers, which mutate over long periods. Babbitt also played a significant role in formalising the vocabulary used to analyse serial music through his many talks and writings. He was the figurehead for a group of highly rigorous younger American serialists who had been educated in the technique as students, which included Charles Wuorinen, Donald Martino, Ralph Shapey, Ursula Mamlok, and Peter Westergaard, evidencing a change in university curricula that indexes the change in serialism's fortunes in the United States (Straus 2009: 124–56). Each created their own idiosyncratic method of working with series in their music. Canada also housed highly systematic serialists, such as Serge Garant in Quebec. Garant's music, however, responded primarily to European strategies, specifically those of Pierre

Boulez. He is just one example of the significant influence of Boulez in Francophone Canada especially.

Although histories of twentieth-century music tend to focus on composers who took serial methods to their limits, like Babbitt, American and Canadian composers were actually far more likely to treat serialism as just one possible device in their compositional toolkit, as part of the 'freely interpreted tonalism' that Copland described. Post-war music with serial elements written in these countries demonstrates a wide array of highly flexible approaches, revealing an 'extreme diversity', as Babbitt himself wrote (Babbitt 1955: 53). Multiple serialism particularly was of much less interest to American composers than their European colleagues: on the contrary, many who used serial methods retained a sense of a home key in their works. Roger Sessions, for example, described the twelve-tone technique as 'essentially practical', taking no issue with listeners who heard 'tonal centres' in his music and objecting to the 'absolute distinction some people make between tonal music and nontonal music' (quoted in Imbrie 1971: 63; Cone 1971b: 102).

Of all the composers living in the United States and Canada who embraced this more flexible approach to serialism, Igor Stravinsky was probably the most significant and influential. Like Schoenberg, Stravinsky was an émigré, having come to the United States in 1939 from revolutionary Russia by way of Switzerland and France. Given he had long cast himself in opposition to Schoenberg and the serial method, few anticipated Stravinsky's sudden swerve in 1952, when he was in his late sixties. His turn to serialism seems to have been the result of a combination of related factors: a growing interest in the music of Schoenberg and Webern and the creative possibilities of their methods; Schoenberg's death in 1951; the influence of Robert Craft; and also, some speculate, fear of losing status amongst younger composers (Walsh 1988: 217–23; Straus 2003: 149–52; Craft 1992: 33–48). Like many of his colleagues working in the United States and Canada, Stravinsky's serial language is highly individualistic. Although a series of pitches served as his starting point (frequently significantly fewer than twelve), he often repeated pitches and created themes with his aggregates. In contrast to Schoenberg's Expressionist serialism, Stravinsky's approach showed the influence of Webern and also connects to Stravinsky's own previous neoclassical style, employing clean, sparse textures and symmetrical designs and using small motivic cells to generate larger structures. Stravinsky employed serial strategies for the remainder of his life. Each resulting work is highly individual – and highly original – in both its approach to serialism and the sound world it creates, as

a comparison of *Agon* (1953–7) with *Threni* (1957–8), for example, immediately makes plain.

Another well-established and highly respected composer of tonal music in the United States, Copland, also took up serialism after the Second World War, provoking similar levels of astonishment from composers, critics, and audiences alike. Like Stravinsky, Copland turned to the method early in the 1950s, starting with the Piano Quartet (1950). As Copland explained in a 1968 interview, ‘the younger fellows, Boulez and such’ had shown him it was possible to ‘keep the method while throwing away the esthetic’, which he found excessively Romantic – too ‘*weltschmerz*’ – and even ‘too German’. ‘German music’, Copland said, ‘was the thing we were trying to get out from under’; he had felt in earlier decades, he said, that for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, ‘the expressive quality of their music took precedence over their method’. Now freed of its Central European philosophical baggage by Boulez’s music, he said, serialism ‘freshened up one’s technique and one’s approach’, offering ‘a new way of moving tones about’. Interestingly, however, in the same interview he described his approach to serialism as ‘very much in the Schoenberg line’ and made plain that he was ‘very vague’ in his knowledge of ‘current methods’ (Cone 1968: 67–8). He was also quick to demonstrate a long-standing interest in serial methods, despite his reputation as a tonalist, pointing out that he had used series in music before, most notably in the *Piano Variations* of 1930 (which, he said, used a seven-note row) (Cone 1968: 66). Nevertheless, and despite this history, Copland’s shift to serialism as a well-established, fifty-year-old, accessible Americanist, alongside Stravinsky’s, seemed to indicate that a sea change was underway in the American music scene.

Although Copland’s Schoenbergian serial works seem to have been of only marginal interest to younger composers, they found Stravinsky’s applications of the method to be of much greater significance. American serialists like Babbitt and Wuorinen paid attention, publishing analyses of them in leading journals. Soon, numerous American and Canadian composers were developing a serial style that had much in common with that of Stravinsky, including Arthur Berger, Irving Fine, Louise Talma, and John Beckwith (Straus 2009: 39–40). Some of these composers had been writing serial music before Stravinsky’s change of course; they claimed their influences actually came from other places. Whatever the chain of influence, they share with Stravinsky a similar tonally inflected writing and approach to texture, rhythm, and mood (Straus 2009: 93–102). Talma, who used symmetrical serial rows within a ‘perfect-fifth oriented diatonic sound

world', said that the approach of Fine and Stravinsky 'made . . . musical sense' in a way that 'strict serial writing did not' (Talma, quoted in Straus 2009: 102).

Canadian composers' interest in taking a more flexible approach to serial methods began right after the Second World War. Barbara Pentland's first serial work was the *Octet for Winds* (1948): it came about following conversations with Weinzwieg and Dika Newlin (a Schoenberg student and scholar). Like Copland, with whom she had studied at Tanglewood, Pentland believed that an 'intuitive' approach to serialism offered a way 'to escape the nineteenth century', where everything was 'overstuffed and heavy' (Straus 2009: 86). After a 1955 visit to the Darmstadt New Music Courses, her music was increasingly influenced by that of Webern, although she continued to treat her rows with significant freedom, developing her own distinctive methods. In later decades, Pentland took the unusual step of combining serialism with aleatoric procedures, creating opportunities for improvisation on twelve-tone materials.

Numerous American composers adopted a similarly instinctive approach to serialism, ignoring the supposed 'rules', rejecting the strict approaches associated (rightly or wrongly) with Babbitt and Boulez, and exploring serial methods as one technique among many. Ben Weber, for example, thought of serial techniques as simply offering 'an available form', providing a precompositional starting point, after which he would 'make up his own rules' (Weber, quoted in Straus 2009: 72). Ross Lee Finney, meanwhile, used the twelve-tone method to enhance the 'expressive potential' of his predominantly tonal compositions (Susan Hayes Hitchens, quoted in Straus 2009: 80). Finney was a student of Sessions, who also embraced the method primarily as a means to create coherence, without avoiding tonal implications (Pollack 1992: 432). Charles Wuorinen is another composer in this group, utilising serial organisation but retaining pitch centrality. For Donald Martino, too, the twelve-tone system was 'a universe of interconnected tone roads', helping create a path through a chromatic universe and serving to create formal unity, but without privileging a single row, as Schoenberg did (James Boros, quoted in Straus 2009: 129). The first Canadian serialist, Weinzwieg, embraced a more flexible employment of tone rows during the 1960s and 1970s, utilising tonal centres and triadic harmonies, employing row-independent pitch material, and making 'the divergence of serial and non-serial techniques itself into a structural element', as music theorist Catherine Nolan has written (Nolan 2011: 147).

Weinzweig was one amongst a small group of Canadian and American composers who combined serial writing with jazz influences in their music. Gunther Schuller was the composer best known for this distinctly North American stylistic fusion. He dubbed it 'Third Stream', an approach that, he said, 'must be born out of a respect for and full dedication to *both* the musics it attempts to fuse' (Schuller 1986: 116). Hale Smith, an African American composer trained in both classical and jazz traditions, employed jazz more subtly in his twelve-tone compositions, using it, for example, to shape his approach to phrasing (Straus 2009: 114).

Contexts for Serialism's Post-War Prestige

What brought a European compositional approach that most pre-war American and Canadian composers had ignored to a place of significant prestige in the 1950s? Certainly the wartime arrival of prominent European serialists had been significant. But two other factors represent important contexts for the increasing interest in serial methods at this time. The first was the changing university music scene, and the second, the cultural politics of the Cold War.

Never before had American and Canadian university music schools and departments offered such a welcoming home for composers. Although many significant serialists in these countries operated outside of the university, the growth of composition programmes certainly helped in bolstering (and sometimes also challenging) the prestige of serialism, both in the United States and Canada. Where before the Second World War only a very few composers saw a university degree as essential to their training, with the rush of veterans to enrol in degree programs at the end of the war, more and more young composers sought out a university education. A proportion of those in this group went on to join leading émigrés and established American-born composers in seeking professorial positions to sustain their compositional careers, helping launch and grow composition programmes, including graduate degrees, in universities across the continent. With the scientific method increasingly revered in the academy and across society at large, music schools seeking to offer higher degrees in composition emphasised the 'research' and 'experiment' involved in the composer's craft to justify their value. In some locales, this meant an emphasis on methods of musical composition deemed more 'scientific', which included serial approaches. Princeton's composition professors, for example, when advertising their composition programme in the early

1960s, described composition as ‘a difficult and demanding intellectual activity’, which ‘demands thought as rigorous, informed, and precise as does mathematics’ (Babbitt, Cone, and Arthur Mendel, quoted in Girard 2007: 213). One of their most celebrated faculty members, Milton Babbitt, famously depicted the composer as a ‘specialist’, whose experiments, like those of a physicist, need not be understood by the general public to be of value to society (Babbitt 1958). Perspectives like these were certainly not held by all university composers, however, or even by all serialists. Krenek complained that ‘in some circles the attachment to science has become a sort of status symbol’ (Krenek 1971: 129). Such developments also precipitated the growth of music theory as a distinct research discipline, built principally on a fast-growing body of scholarly approaches to analysing twelve-tone music and on Heinrich Schenker’s theories of tonal harmony (Girard 2007).

With a number of serialists now in university posts, a few prestigious university and conservatory music programmes became major centres for serial composition. Perhaps surprisingly, given the relatively conservative history of its music program until that point, Harvard quickly became a front-runner in this regard. In the late 1940s, this university was seen as the top destination for American composition students, primarily thanks to faculty member Walter Piston, who had been using the twelve-tone technique since the early 1940s. Many of his students, including Carter and Harold Shapero, followed suit, fusing Schoenbergian methods with neo-classicism. In the mid-fifties, however, the centre of serial activity shifted to Princeton and later Juilliard, where students (and future leading composers) like Finney, Leon Kirchner, Donald Martino, David Del Tredici, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich studied serialism with Sessions and Babbitt (Pollack 1992: 426). Another influential twelve-tone community blossomed under Weinzwieg at the University of Toronto. Importantly, however, not all universities embraced serialism. Indeed, some worked actively to keep it out of their curriculum. At the Eastman School of Music, faculty opposition to Schoenberg’s method was well known, as described above (p. 229). Director Howard Hanson sought to ensure a focus on tonal Americanist music, often voicing his opposition to serialism (Ansari 2018: 30–1).

The Cold War was another major factor in the growing prestige of serialism after the Second World War, especially in the United States. The stand-off between the USSR and the United States had the strange effect of implicitly associating music-stylistic choices with ideological positions. With accessible tonal music problematically associated with the

propaganda efforts of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and amidst growing anxiety that Communism might be infiltrating American society, the previously widespread commitment to accessible compositions that evoked a distinctly national experience was suddenly called in question. As an anti-Communist fervour gripped the United States in the early 1950s, peaking with Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations of Communist influence, politically left-wing composers in particular seemed to experience growing anxiety about writing accessible nationalist music. This style now risked association with the Soviets' required artistic approach – socialist realism – and thus with Communist politics. In this context, some understood serialism as a representation of Western freedom, democracy, logical empiricism, and science, in opposition to tonal approaches increasingly problematised as the musical language of oppressive regimes (Ansari 2018). As Krenek put it, for example, the choice to adopt serialism – a style that the totalitarian 'tyrants' hated – was for him a way to protest and resist their influence (Krenek 1971: 127).

Against this background, and especially in the late fifties and early sixties, some leading composers began to characterise tonality and atonality as binary opposites. More than simply alternative approaches to harmony and pitch, atonality and serialism were now cast by some as two distinct stylistic positions between which one had to choose. This happened even as numerous composers were combining tonal and serial elements in their music and in spite of Schoenberg's own claims that they were far from incompatible (cf. Schoenberg 1975b: 263). Composers considering themselves on the 'tonal' side of the dyad were particularly apt to describe the situation as polarised. Leonard Bernstein, for example, spoke in 1957 of a 'great split' that had divided the musical world into 'two camps: the atonalists, who believe tonality to be a dead duck, as against all others, who are struggling to preserve tonality at all costs'. He expanded his military metaphor further in describing Stravinsky's decision to embrace serialism, saying it felt 'like the defection of a general to the enemy camp, taking all his faithful regiments with him' (Bernstein 1967: 201–2). Concerns about an artificial and polemic-inducing separation between tonal and serial composers were not limited to tonal composers, however. Finney, for example, who combined tonal and serial elements in his compositions using a system he called 'complementarity', spoke of an 'untenable ... division' that had been constructed between serial and tonal composers in the 1950s by music critics and other non-composers who overemphasised the opposition. As a result, he said, 'a battle raged' between the two sides (Finney, quoted in Straus 2009: 80).

A growing divide between 'avant-garde' and 'conservative' composers played out in Canada, too. University composition students had to manage the difficulties that came with being placed into one 'camp' or the other, depending on the composer they were studying with (Keillor 2006: 219). There is no evidence (at least, none yet) that Canadian composers linked musical choices with ideological ones. Rather, it seems that Canadians experienced the Cold War a little differently. Take, for example, their composition of serial works on national subjects, such as Harry Somers's *North Country* (1948), a serial work about Canadian landscapes, and John Beckwith's *The Trumpets of Summer* (1964), which uses serial techniques to set a text by Margaret Atwood about Shakespeare's important place in Canada. In the United States at this time, by contrast, nationalist serialism seemed to be an oxymoron for most, with Americanists who had turned to serialism typically producing serial works that had non-programmatic titles and abstract content. Canadian composers were frequently startled by the vitriolic divisions between tonal and serial composers that they witnessed in both Europe and the United States. Harry Somers, for example, was surprised to discover that Darius Milhaud forbade serialism when he went to study with him in 1949 (Keillor 2006: 220). Glenn Gould wrote with bemusement and sarcasm in 1955 about having recently discovered that Boulez had turned against Schoenberg, a development that created a 'cultural quake' which had, he said, only just reached Toronto, but which apparently required 'each of us to declare his allegiance or take his stand against the new order' (Gould 1956: 20).

While Canadian composers watched the Cold War culture wars from a concerned outsider perspective, for some American composers such developments were not merely surprising and damaging, they also precipitated profound anxiety. Virgil Thomson wrote in 1961 that it felt radical for him to resist serialism and other experimental approaches and to continue writing relatively accessible music 'in a time of fear and conformities, of cold wars and urgent concealments', when most composers were hiding 'behind a thick wall of complexity' (Thomson 2002: 164–5). At around the same time, Roy Harris described the popularity of serialism as the artistic reflection of a climate of fear (Ansari 2018: 115). For Harris, serialism was an excessively restrictive approach, incompatible with democratic values. Harris and Bernstein would both experience compositional crises in the 1960s, as they tried to reconcile their profound investment in musical Americanism and their love for tonality with a compositional climate which they believed saw both as politically problematic (Ansari 2018: 93–127 and 162–99).

Intertwined with the anti-Communist anxiety made manifest with McCarthy's suddenly increased power and influence was the 'Lavender Scare'. This was another reactionary Washington-led effort, which further marginalised already-endangered and marginalised homosexuals in American government and society by marking them as politically dangerous. Nadine Hubbs has argued that the rise of serialism in the United States was, at least in part, a response to the view among some composers that the success and dominance of musical Americanism in the first half of the century – a movement with several gay leading figures – was a kind of homosexual conspiracy. In this context, serialism (perceived as ultra-masculine and ultra-scientific) would 'masculinise' American music for the new Cold War context, minimising the problematic 'femininity' of the homosexual-dominated Americanist circle (Hubbs 2004: 158–69).

For leading Americanist Aaron Copland – a leftist, a homosexual, and also a Jew – such anxieties may well have played a role in his decision to turn to serialism. There is, however, also plentiful evidence that Copland was very attracted to serialism as an artistic tool, once he had appreciated it was possible to utilise the method without embracing the Romantic, Austro-Germanic aesthetic (see Cone 1971a, 141). Furthermore, Copland's pre-war oeuvre had also revealed his interest in serial organisation.

Indeed, Copland's case serves as a cautionary tale for those seeking to contextualise the high status of serialism in the United States during the Cold War. The fact that Cold War-exacerbated anxieties around Communism and homosexuality seem to have played a role in bolstering the appeal of serialism for American composers after the war certainly does *not* mean that the method was *only* a political move for those who chose to utilise it. A composer like Copland was undoubtedly a victim of Cold War anxieties and may have deliberately (or subconsciously) turned to a compositional approach that drew less attention to his politically problematic characteristics. That does not mean, however, that he was not *also* attracted to twelve-tone methods for purely artistic reasons.

The 1970s brought a remarkably strong backlash against the prestige of serialism during the previous two decades, as tonally oriented, postmodern approaches came into fashion. Both tonal composers and formerly serial composers began to use strong language to describe the dominance of serialism during the previous decades. Their metaphors were violent, ideological, and political: they spoke of 'serial killings', of 'totalitarian modernism', and of 'a kind of Nazism in music', in which tonality was '*verboten*' (Rorem 2001: 115–16; David Del Tredici, quoted in Page 1983:

SM22; Cairns 2010). Some asserted that the domestic and international effects of the Cold War were to blame for this situation. Elie Siegmeister, retrospectively examining the 'death' of musical Americanism, blamed it on 'the savage trauma of mass destruction, the deep anxieties produced by the bomb, the disillusionment with human ideals arising from the Cold War, and the vicious persecutions of the McCarthy period' (Siegmeister 1977).

These *ex post facto* assertions that serialism's dominance in the American music scene of the 1950s and 1960s had political causes have appeared highly dubious to some scholars. Joseph Straus, for example, has questioned claims made during the 1970s of a 'serial tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s, arguing that tonal composers experienced nothing more than 'the soft tyranny of fashionability' (Straus 2009: 202). I believe, however, that it is problematic to dismiss composers' claims of social and political pressure to write serial music as no more than sour grapes – especially given the existence of sources from the 1950s and 1960s that describe feelings of polarisation, an obligation to choose, and a resulting anxiety. But this is not a story of good guys and bad guys. It is possible to acknowledge that some composers felt pressure to turn to serialism without parroting their divisive metaphors – or blaming serial composers for this development. It is also necessary continually to re-emphasise that serialism and tonality were never, in fact, incompatible opposites, nor, for American serialists at least, were they treated musically or philosophically as such. Piston, for example, reminded one interviewer that tonality never 'collapsed', despite the proclamations of many younger composers (Westergaard 1971: 166). And yet the binarisation of tonality and serialism *is* evident in many Cold War composers' rhetoric. It seems highly likely, in this context, that the extreme social conformism and political polarisation of the 1950s fed an 'us/them' mentality for some in the compositional world, which endured into the 1960s. In some cases, this tension between approaches produced compelling musical explorations of both tonal and serial methods simultaneously; for some, it meant 'picking a side'; and for others, it brought internal conflict and significant aesthetic challenges.

The 1970s and Beyond

The fact that serialism's prestige in the United States and Canada was eclipsed by neo-tonal, experimental, and postmodern approaches in the 1970s and beyond does not mean that the history of serialism in these

countries ended there. In fact, it remained influential and, even today, continues to occupy a significant place in these countries' music scenes. With the strength of the anti-serial backlash in the 1970s, however, which continues to echo in some quarters, serial composers felt increasingly marginalised and stigmatised, such that they felt obliged to undertake their exploration of serial methods quietly and without fanfare (Straus 2009: 157).

Nevertheless, composers continued to create new serial methods. Ever the pioneer, Babbitt took his serial experimentation to a new level in 1981, beginning to compose with what he called 'super-arrays'. That same year, Shapey began to utilise a special twelve-tone array he dubbed 'the Mother Lode'. Much more common, however, has been the subjection of ordered pitch collections to serial procedures within the context of otherwise freely and instinctively constructed music. Indeed, for many decades now, there has been much less of a sense amongst composers that one must be a 'serial composer' to write serial music. The 'us/them' mentality of the post-war period is, thankfully, long gone, and serial methods are most often employed alongside many others. Canadian minimalist Ann Southam, for example, used twelve-tone procedures in many of her works, sometimes combining them with jazz or minimalist techniques, as in her largely tonal *Full Circles* (1996) and *Rivers* (1979) (Yates 2021). In works like his 1979 *Sparrows*, Joseph Schwantner provides a similar example from across the border, applying a systematic treatment to the twelve-tone aggregate, but doing so amidst tonal-sounding areas, periods of harmonic stasis, and the use of cyclic patterns (Straus 2009: 159; Folio 1985). Serialism has had a major impact in the United States and Canada. It looks likely to continue to play a role in composers' musical explorations as this century continues.