



Tom Schnauber:

WHICH WAY IS UP?

Another brand of institution that American composers inhabit is the liberal arts college, such as my current place of employ. The teaching experience here, though, is rather different. While the main job of teacher-composers at conservatoires and music schools is to train the next generation of musicians—basically to make more teacher-composers—the population I teach is one whose interest in music is mostly avocational. Aside from a handful who have a talent for it and want to delve deeper, the students I work with are young adults who are exploring music in the broad experiential context inherent in an American-style liberal arts education. Therefore, most of the courses I teach are of the survey kind, more breadth than depth; I don't teach music so much as teach *about* music.

At first blush, it might seem that primarily instructing people who have no background in, theoretical understanding of, or even a particular attraction to music would be somewhat demoralizing. And it is—if you approach it like an academic scholar. Sometimes I ache to expound on Schubert's quasi-modal tonality in the opening of *Der König in Thule*, or help a student explore expressive uses for extended techniques in a new string quartet; but I might as well be talking about quantum string theory. On the other hand, there is an advantage to working with this population, since they are a fairly representative cross-section (though tilting somewhat young) of the general public that goes to concerts and buys recordings. They are basically the audience at large. Over the 11 years that I have taught here, I have learned a lot about how this audience experiences music and why. This insight has a direct impact on my own work; not on the way I write music, but rather on how I expect my music (and that of my colleagues) to be perceived. It turns out that what I do as a teacher goes a long way to explain why what I do as a composer has the limited appeal it seems to have.

engagement with those riches. On a practical level, it has essentially eliminated the various traditions of *Hausmusik* that gave people an active, physical connection to music. More broadly, though, the fast-paced disposability we have come to expect of everything we consume, not to mention the barrage of signals assaulting us from the endless array of screens and speakers we have imposed on ourselves, have simply exhausted the curiosity out of most people. Music in particular has fallen prey to the bustle; to the “man in the street” it has become, at best, something listened to just for the noise it makes and, at worst, sonic wallpaper. One of the biggest differences between now and times past is the sheer volume of options and the ease with which music can be accessed, ingested, and discarded. The overwhelming nature of it all usually leads to passive and thoughtless consumption on the part of listeners, habits that are already ingrained in most by the time they reach college.

Technology has also led to some fascinating time-travel issues with music perception. When I play excerpts from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* for my music-theater course, most students say the music sounds like *Star Wars*; when I play Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* for my history of song course, most students say it sounds like music from a horror film. Obviously *Pierrot* predates *Psycho*; and Williams used Wagner as a model, not the other way around. But the century or so that separates those works from now was the one in which the American industry became a leading producer of widely disseminated music in the country. Furthermore, the first 60 years were dominated by what was essentially utilitarian orchestral concert music. Those that defined the sounds of Hollywood—composers like Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Dmitri Tiomkin, or Miklós Rózsa—were conservatory trained. Later generations, of which Williams and others

In my first year as a professor at my current institution, one of the courses I taught was a survey of Western music, a one-semester catch-all summarizing the last 1500 years of European and North American musical styles and genres. At the end of the first session, after I had played a handful of works from various periods for the class, a student approached me and asked, “Does Classical music have rhythm?”, to which I replied without hesitation, “Oh, yes, of course.” I must not have been convincing, though; he dropped the class the next day. Only later did I realize that one of the reasons he didn't stay might have been the conceptual canyon that existed between his question and my answer. As a person with years of conservatory training, the question I heard was, “Does music written between 1720 and 1800 proceed through time in a pulsatile manner?” But, as an average 18-year-old from urban America, what he was really asking was, “Does any of that stuff written before I was born have drums?”, to which my answer was, at the very least, inaccurate.

The role of composer as teacher has a long and venerable history. In the U.S., that history comprises two basic paths: either private instruction or instruction in the context of an academic institution. The latter has been the primary mode for nearly a century and has many variants, depending on the type of institution. Composers can, of course, teach at music-specific conservatories, such as the Julliard School or Curtis Institute, which are more or less the equivalent of the German *Hochschule*. We can also teach at universities that contain within them a school of music—a sort of in-house conservatory that serves not only music majors but also the institution's general student population—among which are my almae matres.

The inconsistent place music as a topic and practice has in primary and secondary education is, of course, part of the problem. While most kids learn songs in school, the amount of actual hands-on music making that a student will have experienced before entering college can vary dramatically, from relative fluency to complete ignorance; though the latter is far more common. One of my most telling experiences in this regard happened a few years ago when a student who was enrolled in my basic music notation course came to my office for consultation. I sat her down at the piano and asked her to find middle C, which she did with some effort. I then asked her to play a G above it; she stared at the piano for a bit, then asked, “So, when you go higher, do you go left or right?” Since I myself have no memory of ever not knowing the geography of a keyboard, the question took me by surprise, almost as if someone were asking for clarification on how to breathe (“So, when you inhale, does your diaphragm move down or up?”). But I realized that there was no intrinsic reason for her to have known that a higher pitch is achieved through motion toward the right; and, from what I can tell, she represents a majority. In fact, most people across the board these days have very little kinesthetic sense of making music at all.

Lack of proficiency, however, does not automatically mean lack of musical perceptiveness. People can listen and engage without having to play, and in that regard one would think that now would be a Golden Age for teaching in the arts. We have unprecedented access to constellations of music from nearly every corner of the world, an embarrassment of audible riches for which experts and curious music lovers can indulge in anything their ears desire. We also have the technology to bring all these aural wonders into the classroom with little more than a few mouse clicks. Unfortunately, that very same technology works against an involved

like Jerry Goldsmith and James Horner are part, carried on in that tradition, most prominently for films in the Science Fiction, Adventure, and Fantasy genres. Even currently active film composers with less range, such as Howard Shore or Hans Zimmer, owe much of their sonic aesthetic to that of the 1800s and early 1900s; they are among the stylistic descendants of Wagner and Schoenberg. But since most of today's audiences are unfamiliar with that history, when they hear orchestral music from a hundred-plus years ago, they end up in effect remarking on how much the grandparent inherited the grandchild's features. When this cockeyed sensibility is combined with the general impression that orchestral music is an old fashioned pastime, contemporary music for orchestra ends up living in a bizarre associative space: New (concert) music for an old ensemble that also plays old music that sounds like new (film) music. Or, simply put: people don't really know what to make of it.

This issue has been complicated even more in the last decade or so by the explosion of elaborate video games. In addition to being highly cinematic in their visual complexity, they boast some of the most ambitious neo-Romantic instrumental music being written in this country. However, that music is carried out almost entirely by synthesized orchestras; in fact, biographies of the musicians who create these soundtracks, such as Martin O'Donnell and Michael Salvatore, often use the verb “produce” rather than “compose” or “write”. To someone who has spent a lot of time listening to real symphony orchestras, these synthetic “ensembles” have a flatness to them, like textureless plastic. However, since many in this country, especially young people, are exposed to orchestral music through that medium (or television, which largely uses the same machinery), true acoustic instruments tend to sound false; the originals are judged to be imitations of their

facsimiles. By and large, the aesthetics of American audiences relegate the colors of instrumental music to the subordinate role of accompaniment to visual imagery, and they expect what they're hearing to be as unrealistically hyper-produced as what they are seeing.

Of course, many contemporary concert composers also use electronics. But rather than substituting them for acoustic instruments, these artists try to create entirely new, unfamiliar sonorities that, if they were to appear in a video game or television show, would be interpreted by most as odd sound effects rather than actual music. Which brings us back to where things stand in general for contemporary composers in the U.S. We belong to a tradition that is not American-born, is both graced and plagued by the habits of academia, follows no stylistic standards to guide the craft, does not lend itself to easy consumption, lies outside mainstream expectations, and is a small drop in an overwhelming sea of offerings; not to mention that fact that, from a purely economic standpoint, it is rarely viable: the supply of material far exceeds the demand.

We could, of course, forget about all this and just keep writing. But, unlike some of our ivy-covered predecessors, most of us these days are uncomfortable with the idea of composing in a hermitage. On its own, composition is a self-indulgent act. To be sure, it is one that sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom—no other species creates something from nothing; and it can be a cathartically brilliant burst of human spirit. But music without listeners is like architecture without buildings; it has no definition beyond itself until it is realized by other musicians for other people. Even then, the impact is usually shallow unless the

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We composers often feel like the lost heirs to a near-dead art, pouring our souls into an abyss of indifference. I often wonder why we do it at all. Music is a temporal art, a phenomenon of fleeting flights of sonic fancy. At its best, though, it touches the spirit in a way that is forever. A few years ago, there was a small WordSong concert in Cambridge that featured a work of mine for solo piano called *Distant Deeps and Skies*, a piece meant to capture the vastness of time in the bottle of three minutes. The performer was a wonderful local pianist; listening to her turn my notes into music was a joy. And at the end of the concert, an elderly woman who had been in the audience approached me and said, "I don't know much about music, but you know what I heard when she played your piece? Stars. I'll be thinking a lot about stars now."

That's why I do it, anyway.

audience actually engages with the music. So how do we get them to do that? It is a much-discussed question that we cannot ignore, but has no easy answer. In any case, working with regular listeners as a teacher has supported what I often suspected from working with them as a musician: If we are to communicate with people through our music, simply writing pieces and having them performed is not enough. If those of us who (ideally) create music requiring alert engagement on multiple levels seek to recapture listeners outside of our own circles, we may have to start by refocusing their attention. A historical perspective is always helpful (though hard to come by given the state of the American public education system); but it is not necessary, as long as we guide potential audiences toward unloading the associative baggage they have with what we do and encourage them to find their ability to listen actively. To offer an example: American composer Howard Frazin and I have had some success in this area since 2008 when we founded the arts organization WordSong in Boston. We felt that if we really wanted to engage listeners, the dynamic among composers, performers, and audiences needed to change. We developed an interactive concert format that is primarily audience-guided in which the people listening are part of what happens in the musical space rather than just passive receivers of new work. The goal is to reconnect listeners with composers and performers of contemporary concert music by rejuvenating the type of synergy that was far more typical in past periods when people had to be with other people to experience music. Convivia and collegia musica, the Salons, the Schubertiadae; they were all based, to varying degrees, on the notion that music is something to be actively shared. The splash of our 21st-century version has been modest, but the ripples are promising.

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JUL — VERANSTALTUNGEN

4.–8. — KomponistInnen-Intensivwoche

Gutshof Sauen – Die Begegnungsstätte der künstlerischen Hochschulen Berlins

Blockseminar in Sauen für Kompositionsstudierende. Instant Composing. Entwickeln von musikalischen, intermedialen und musiktheatralischen Ideen. Gemeinsame Realisation und Reflexion von Kürzestkompositionen. Intensive Arbeitsphasen für individuelle und kollektive Kompositionsprojekte. Bitte Instrumente mitbringen!

Leitung: [Carola Bauckholt](#), [Isabel Mundry](#), [Iris ter Schiphorst](#), [Daniel Ott](#), [François Sarhan](#), [Manos Tsangaris](#) und [Caspar Johannes Walter](#)

Eine Kooperation von [KLANGZEITORT](#) mit der Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber Dresden, der Hochschule für Musik Basel, der Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, der Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität Linz sowie der Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Wien.

13. — 19.30 Uhr — Masterrezital von Julia Andres, Blockflöte

HfM Hanns Eisler Berlin, Charlottenstraße 55, Studiosaal

Rezital von [Julia Andres](#) im Rahmen des Masterstudiums mit dem Schwerpunkt Neue Musik, u. a. mit Werken von [Oscar Bianchi](#), [Mauricio Rodriguez](#), [Chiel Meijering](#), [Astor Piazzolla](#) und [Paul Leenhouts](#).

14. — 14 Uhr — Lecture von Ayal Adler

UdK Berlin, Bundesallee 1–12, Raum 310

Der israelische Komponist [Ayal Adler](#) ist zu Gast im Seminar von Prof. [Daniel Ott](#) und spricht über seine aktuelle Arbeit. Ein besonderer Fokus wird auf der formalen und strukturellen Analyse seiner Komposition »Crystallization for large orchestra« liegen, die 2013 unter der Leitung von [Zubin Mehta](#) vom [Israel Philharmonic Orchestra](#) uraufgeführt wurde. Daneben wird er vor dem Hintergrund starker europäischer Einflüsse und stilistischer Vielfalt Einblicke in die junge und wachsende israelische Szene für zeitgenössische Musik geben, die sich besonders mit Fragen von Identität und Geschichte auseinandersetzt.

Weitere Information finden Sie unter [www.ayaladler.com](#)

17. — 16 Uhr + 18 Uhr — Zoom+Focus

HfM Hanns Eisler Berlin, Charlottenstraße 55, Studiosaal

Die Kompositionsklassen beider Hochschulen führen in einem Doppelkonzert Kompositionen auf, die im Laufe des vorausgegangenen Semesters entstanden sind – diesmal mit Uraufführungen von [Fabian Zeidler](#), [Filip Januchowski](#), [Faidra Chافتa-Douka](#), [Marco Lehne](#), [Mert Morali](#), [Simon Kanzler](#), [Stella Veloce](#), [Malte Giesen](#), [Ellie Gregory](#), [Lea Danzeisen](#), [Misha Cvijovic](#) und [Hendrik Rungelrath](#).

Es spielen das [Ensemble ilinx](#), Studio für Neue Musik der UdK Berlin sowie Studierende der Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin.

Leitung: [Leah Muir](#), [Elena Mendoza](#), [Wolfgang Heiniger](#)

21. — 14 Uhr — Lecture von Yan Jun

UdK Berlin, Bundesallee 1–12, Raum 310

Der chinesische Klangkünstler und Noise-Performer [Yan Jun](#) ist zu Gast im Seminar von Prof. [Daniel Ott](#). [Yan Jun](#) ist in China einer der Pioniere der experimentellen Musik/Klangkunst mit Bezug zum Underground-Rock. Seine Performances und Installationen spiegeln eine Ästhetik des Grenzenlosen, in der alle möglichen Einflüsse aus dem Rock, der experimentellen Kunst oder dem Alltag transformiert werden, wobei er vor allem Elektronik des so genannten »Low Tech«-Bereichs verwendet. Er ist als Musiker, Künstler, Kurator, Musikkritiker und Veranstalter aktiv. 2016/2017 ist er für ein Jahr Gast beim Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD.

In Kooperation mit dem Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD.

30. — 18 Uhr — KlangKunstBühne spezial 2016

Abschlusspräsentation des Workshops »Die handelnde Stimme« mit Jurij Vasiljev

UdK Berlin, Bundesallee 1–12, Probensaal

An diesem Abend zeigen die TeilnehmerInnen des Workshops mit dem Regisseur und Sprechpädagogen [Jurij Vasiljev](#) die Ergebnisse ihrer Arbeitswoche.

AUGUST — VERANSTALTUNG

6. — 19 Uhr — KlangKunstBühne spezial 2016

Abschlusspräsentation des Workshops »Uneins sein« mit She She Pop

UdK Berlin, Bundesallee 1–12, Probensaal

Zwischen dem 1. und 7. August wird das Performance-Kollektiv [She She Pop](#), vertreten durch [Iliá Papatheodorou](#), [Lisa Lucassen](#) und [Sebastian Bark](#), einen einwöchigen Workshop im Rahmen der KlangKunstBühne spezial geben. An diesem Abend zeigen die TeilnehmerInnen des Workshops die Arbeitsergebnisse der Woche.

German-American composer **Tom Schnauber** is Co-Founder of the arts organization WordSong and Professor of Performing Arts at Emmanuel College, Boston. He holds a Ph.D. in Composition and Theory from the University of Michigan. He also studied French horn performance, ethnomusicology, and did a small stint in Hollywood scoring films no one will ever see. Schnauber composes for a variety of vocal and instrumental ensembles, as well as for stage productions. His works have been performed throughout the u.s. and in Europe and Russia.

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