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# Paul Jacobs, Elliott Carter, And An Overview Of Selected Stylistic Aspects Of Night Fantasies

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PAUL JACOBS, ELLIOTT CARTER, AND AN OVERVIEW OF SELECTED  
STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF *NIGHT FANTASIES*

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## ABSTRACT

This study concerns the life and career of Paul Jacobs, focusing in particular on the role Jacobs played in bringing about new American works for piano in the second half of the twentieth century. Jacobs was a key figure in the New York new music scene of the 1960s and 1970s and a personal friend to many composers who were active during this period. The study provides an overview of historical events which brought about the musical climate of late twentieth century America, a climate that was not entirely hospitable to native-born American composers. It examines Jacobs' collaboration with Elliott Carter and the influence Jacobs may have had on works by Carter with which he was associated. The study concludes with an overview of selected stylistic aspects of Carter's *Night Fantasies*. This final chapter is intended to provide pianists interested in Carter's music with a concise introduction to critical aspects of his style. Solutions to certain questions of interpretation are proposed via an examination of documents belonging to Jacobs found within the Paul Jacobs Archive in the New York Library for the Performing Arts.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Virgil Thomson once wrote, “It takes three people to make music properly, one man to write it, another to play it, and a third to criticize it. Anything else is just a rehearsal,” and it is from this conviction that the present study takes its inspiration.<sup>1</sup> Thomson’s statement makes several provocative points, especially his emphasis on the role of the often-maligned music critic. He implies that composer-performers are not necessarily the best interpreters of their own works, and thereby emphasizes the role of the recitalist in the creative-music process. The motivation behind the current study, therefore, is a desire to highlight the profoundly important contributions a single performer can sometimes have on the world of concert music.

Though numerous contemporary composers continue the composer-performer tradition, William Bolcom, Frederick Rzewski, and Thomas Adès being just a few recent examples, more often composers are compelled to seek out and cultivate partnerships with contemporary-minded performers in order for their music to be heard in public. This is not a new phenomenon; such was the state of affairs in the New York City new music scene of the 1960s and 1970s. During these two decades, which belong to a time of incredible exploration in American music, a number of dedicated pianists worked closely alongside avant-garde composers to bring new works to fruition. David Tudor and Noel

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil Thomson, “Life Among the Natives, or Musical Habits and Customs,” in *The State of Music*, Rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 57.



Lee are two well-known examples. But perhaps the most prominent among them was Paul Jacobs, a daring pianist who from the beginning of his career embraced the challenge of new music. He was among the first American pianists to devote his life almost exclusively to new music. Jacobs' colleague Gilbert Kalish explains:

To a generation of performers growing up in the late 1950's and early '60's, Paul appeared as a striking model of the contemporary artist, for he was a remarkably cultured and erudite man steeped in knowledge of the past, and yet fired with the mission of bringing to life the most demanding and advanced music of the present. For a number of years, he was nearly alone in shouldering that mission.<sup>2</sup>

Following his graduation from Juilliard in 1951, Jacobs traveled to France, where he was quickly absorbed into the European avant-garde scene. He performed in Pierre Boulez's *Domaine musical*, premiered new works by Karlheinz Stockhausen and others, and appeared at festivals of new music across the continent. Upon his return to the United States in 1960, he settled in New York, and for twenty years continued to devote himself to the promotion of the avant-garde. In the process, Jacobs became a close associate of several of America's most renowned living composers, including Elliott Carter. In addition to providing a brief overview of Jacobs' role in bringing about new works by William Bolcom and Frederic Rzewski, this study will examine Jacobs' most important commission: Elliott Carter's monumental *Night Fantasies*.

Elliott Carter's Piano Sonata was published in 1946. It was his first work for solo piano. The sonata was written for Ralph Kirkpatrick, the well-known harpsichordist and cataloguer of Scarlatti's keyboard works. Kirkpatrick was a classmate and close friend of Carter's while they were undergraduates at Harvard. Curiously, however, he declined the opportunity to premiere the sonata. One might speculate that this caused Carter some

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Kalish, liner notes to *Claude Debussy, Etudes for Piano, Books I and II*, Paul Jacobs, Elektra Nonesuch, 9 79161-2, CD, 1987.

irritation.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the honor of the premiere fell to Webster Aitken, who gave the piece its first public hearing at the Frick Museum in New York City on February 16, 1947. It was not long before a handful of distinguished pianists, including virtuosos such as Beveridge Webster, began programming the work regularly. In retrospect, the sonata's quick acceptance into the repertoire is a testament to its strengths, and Kirkpatrick's reluctance to premiere the sonata, though odd, is immaterial in view of his otherwise outstanding legacy.

The story of the Piano Sonata's premiere as related above is relevant because it casts an interesting light on what happened next. That is, although the piano plays an prominent role in many of the orchestral and chamber works that came after the sonata, Carter did not write another work for solo piano until almost forty years later, and it took the combined efforts of four of the twentieth century's finest pianists to make it happen: Ursula Oppens, Gilbert Kalish, Charles Rosen, and Paul Jacobs, who organized the entire affair.

When a new piece is commissioned from a composer of Carter's stature, a coalition of performers and financiers may be required to marshal the necessary funding. Such was the case with Carter's second solo piano work, *Night Fantasies*. The critical role Jacobs played in bringing about Carter's masterpiece was representative of his devotion to the avant-garde, and serves as evidence of the critical position Jacobs occupied within the American new music scene of the 1960's and 1970's. In addition to organizing the effort that yielded *Night Fantasies*, Jacobs commissioned a number of other works by American composers during his career; many of which have since assumed prominent positions within the repertoire. Indeed, one might posit that Jacobs,

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<sup>3</sup> James Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 38.

through his activities as performer, collaborator, and financier, was a creative catalyst of sorts, playing a major role in the advancement of twentieth century American piano repertoire. Works that came about due in part to his efforts now serve as an important legacy for succeeding generations of composers and performers.

#### PURPOSE

Firstly, this study examines the life and career of one of the most important pianists of the twentieth century, Paul Jacobs. Little information on Jacobs exists in the public sphere, though a number of online resources preserve the few interviews Jacobs gave during his life. In addition, there are the liner notes Jacobs and others wrote to accompany his recordings. Although outside the scope of this study, a more thorough biographical study on Jacobs would benefit the greater music community, the biographical section of this study merely providing an overview-sketch. This paper is a pioneering effort of sorts in that respect, given the lack of scholarly material concerning Jacobs' career or the substantial contributions he made to American musical culture.

Secondly, the study gives an overview of works commissioned by Jacobs, including pieces by Elliott Carter, William Bolcom, and Frederic Rzewski, concluding with an examination of selected critical aspects of Carter's *Night Fantasies*. Jacobs' repertoire was wide ranging, and although it was not strictly limited to works in the American modernist vein, many of his efforts were certainly concentrated in this area. The study will address important developments found in the works mentioned above, and briefly touch on the historical significance of each work. There is ongoing need for scholarly efforts of all kinds in the realm of American piano music. Consider, for example, that to this date a comprehensive study of Elliott Carter's solo piano music is

yet to appear. In a broader sense, this study serves as a small contribution in the campaign for more frequent programming of American piano music in professional recitals.

### LIMITATIONS

This study is restricted to a biographical sketch of Paul Jacobs and an overview of works he commissioned from American modernist composers. Therefore, the study excludes the historically significant works of American experimentalists, many of whom were included within Jacobs' repertoire. The analytical portions of the study aim to provide a concise overview of the stylistic aspects of *Night Fantasies* that are important from a performance perspective. The latter portion of the document, therefore, is intended to be an aide to performers. Readers seeking in-depth, exhaustive analysis of *Night Fantasies* should consult the excellent writings of John Link, specifically, his doctoral dissertation and an article on Carter's compositional procedure for *Night Fantasies* which, though originally published in *Sonus*, is currently available on Link's personal website.

### METHODOLOGY

The study commences with a biographical study of Jacobs and a discussion of the historical events which influenced America's musical climate in the second half of the twentieth century. To fully grasp the significance of Jacobs' accomplishments, one must be cognizant of the biases against American music that existed during his career. Jacobs' role within the New York new music scene of the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing accounts of prominent composers and performers preserved within Jacobs' personal correspondence, makes him an ideal representative of an uncertain period in American music history.

The biographical section focuses on Jacobs' activities in the United States, from his return from Paris in 1960 until his death in 1983, and identifies the commissions Jacobs supported during this time frame, including piano works by William Bolcom and Frederic Rzewski. The portion of the study dealing with these two composers focuses on Jacobs' role in bringing their works to fruition. Selected passages from Jacobs' personal correspondence are included.

The portion of the study concerning *Night Fantasies* is introduced via a background sketch of Jacobs' and Carter's collaboration and a discussion centering on accessibility issues in Carter's mature music. An examination of selected stylistic features of *Night Fantasies* follows, concluding with an assessment of the work's current position within the repertoire. The entire study concludes with a brief essay that offers generalized observations on late twentieth-century trends in American piano works and speculates on the piano's relevance as a solo instrument in the twenty first century.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

The most comprehensive biographical accounts of Paul Jacobs' life and career are found in the liner notes which accompany the handful of recordings Jacobs made with Nonesuch records. Several of the Nonesuch recordings have recently been reissued on the Arbiter label, which maintains a website where many of the liner notes are published. Apart from these sources and a handful of concert reviews in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, the majority of primary source material concerning Jacobs is currently housed within the special collections at the New York Library for the Performing Arts. Their substantial collection includes Jacobs' personal and business correspondence, concert programs, manuscripts, photographs, and scores with Jacobs' own markings.

Relatively few scholarly sources exist for the music of Frederic Rzewski and William Bolcom. With regards to Rzewski, a number of dissertations and articles are available online. Most of these deal primarily with either *The People United Will Never be Defeated*, or the *North American Ballads*. Likewise, most of the extant dissertations concerning Bolcom's piano music survey the *Twelve New Etudes*. Many of these studies feature expansion of piano technique and performance concerns as their primary subject matter.

David Schiff's *The Music of Elliott Carter* has been invaluable, in particular the first edition, which was published in 1983, just after the completion of *Night Fantasies*. Schiff was one of Carter's students during his tenure at the Juilliard School, and his scholarly efforts have preserved a number of Carter's informal observations concerning his own music that otherwise would have been lost to history. The 1983 edition is valued not only for its comprehensive overview with analytical remarks of Carter's works through 1980, but especially for several prefatory chapters that cover fundamental aspects of Carter's style. James Wierzbicki's 2011 *Elliott Carter* is a more recent publication that synthesizes much of the scholarly work done on Carter up to the time of its printing. Wierzbicki's research is thorough, and his book provides many valuable insights.

Charles Rosen, along with Jacobs, was an advocate for Carter's music long before Carter's emergence onto the national scene. Rosen's only book-length publication on Carter's music, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, is a collection of essays and interviews with the composer that addresses many of the fundamental musical processes that interest Carter. In addition to this source, Rosen has published a number of articles and reviews. There are also recorded lectures by Rosen in which he discusses Carter's

music, most significantly “The Challenges of Modernist Music,” given at the City University of New York, in which Rosen offers analytical remarks of one of Carter’s later works for solo piano, 90+. Rosen also gave a series of interviews with David Dubal for the WNCN-FM radio program “For the Love of Music,” in which he relates a number of interesting anecdotes relevant to the study.

John Link’s dissertation, “Long-Range Polyrhythms in Elliott Carter’s Recent Music,” is concise and comprehensive in its coverage of the abstract properties of polyrhythms, and its analysis of the polyrhythm used in *Night Fantasies*. An article by Link in *Sonus*, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” tracks the evolution of Carter’s thought on the work, from the earliest sketches to the preparation of the fair copy. This document is especially helpful in regards to the harmonic elements in *Night Fantasies*. Jeeyeon Yim’s dissertation, “The Reciprocity of Analysis, Aesthetics and Performance in Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” is excessively ambitious and often problematic, though it contains several interesting observations.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, BIOGRAPHY

In order to fully appreciate Paul Jacobs' contributions to American music it is necessary to remind ourselves about the state of concert music in the United States during the decades that followed the end of the Second World War. Throughout this period, as it had been at the end of the nineteenth century, American music was considered second-class, with European composers and compositional trends dominating much of what was taking place within American concert halls and academic circles. An inflated estimate of European music and musicians helped foster feelings of American inferiority, and the country's music seemed to be continually struggling with an identity crises of sorts until perhaps the late twentieth century.

American-born composers have long been aware of the problem of their nation's elusive musical identity. Ned Rorem was once asked, "Is American music becoming less American today?" Rorem responded, "Define American music, please, and then I'll answer the question."<sup>4</sup> A young Charles Wuorinen offered the following response when asked if he might discuss some of the distinguishing characteristics of American music:

The overt cliché that used to characterize a substantial amount of American music has vanished...it seems to me that there are certain qualities of American music – mostly in the rhythmic area – that set most of it off from other music; but I couldn't be more precise in identifying them than that.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Hinson, "Great Composers in Our Time: Ned Rorem," *The Piano Quarterly*, no. 110 (Summer 1980): 9.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Wuorinen, "An Interview with Barney Childs," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz, Barney Childs, and Jim Fox (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998),



It is not entirely clear to what the “overt cliché” refers, but Wuorinen is likely referencing the populist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, exemplified in works by Aaron Copland. Apart from populism, however, there are few shared characteristics among American composers that might define a distinctively American style.

Kyle Gann’s seminal *American Music in the Twentieth Century* opens with a prefatory essay that provides a concise overview of the “American music problem.” Academics and performers alike must contend with what Gann describes as America’s “musical inferiority complex,” an affliction deeply rooted within the national consciousness. He traces the origins of this endemic disorder, which still affects American musicians to this day (albeit in varying degrees), back to the genesis of academic music in America. Gann recounts how Harvard University’s first professorship of music, which was the first such position in the entire country, was granted to John Knowles Paine, who received his formal musical training in Berlin. George Whitefield Chadwick, who taught at Boston’s New England Conservatory, and Horatio Parker, who trained Charles Ives at Yale, were similarly educated in Germany. “The power of this triumvirate, then, in imposing an exaggerated awe of European musical standards and practices, was incalculable. One could say that American music has not yet succeeded in completely escaping its grip.”<sup>6</sup> More than merely a symbolic adoption of European values, these forefathers transplanted European-style educational curricula to the United States, and together mentored the next generation of American composers; a generation

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371. The interview includes an exchange between Wuorinen and Childs in which Wuorinen dismisses the idea of a distinctive American style.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Gann, *American Music in the 20th Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 3.

that included, along with Ives, John Alden Carpenter, Arthur Foote, Quincy Porter, and Roger Sessions.

In the early twentieth century native composers began to break away from European traditions. The years between the end of the First World War and the Great Depression were “a kind of golden age of musical Americanness. No major European composers were on hand to exert direct influence (as they were and did after WWII), and Americans felt independent enough to determine their own musical destiny.”<sup>7</sup> The establishment of the International Composer’s Guild in 1921 and the League of Composers two years later further codified the movement, demonstrating that emergent American composers had recognized the importance of cooperation and “learned to band themselves together and to achieve performances of their works through their own combined efforts.”<sup>8</sup> Copland closes his survey of the American situation in *Our New Music* with a naïve prediction that contemporary American music was about to enter a new phase, a period in which it would gain greater acceptance, equal recognition, and more frequent programming. “New music in future will no longer be confined to the sphere of the special society. Now it must interest the general public through the usual concert channels and the usual interpreters....”<sup>9</sup> Writing in 1941, Copland could not have predicted the events of the next decade.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1940s and 50s, America’s efforts to assert its musical independence stalled when faced with the mass-influx of composers, performers, and conductors who fled Europe prior to the Second World War. Although undoubtedly a boon for concertgoers,

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<sup>7</sup> Kyle Gann, *American Music in the 20th Century*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, Rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968), 106.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “The preceding paragraph proves how dangerous it is to attempt to predict the course that any current musical development will take.” Aaron Copland, *The New Music*, 107.

for American composers and performers the arrival of so much European talent was devastating. The following passage from *American Music in the Twentieth Century* perfectly illustrates the situation:

In the prewar period, conductors had felt some obligation to program American works. Under the American conductor Frederick Stock, for example, the Chicago Symphony, which he directed until 1942, normally performed one American work per concert...After World War II, partly because of the influx of Europeans (especially conductors) who had no faith or interest in American composers, that rate dropped down to about two or three American works per orchestra per year. From the standpoint of American music's presence in classical music programs, the influx of European émigrés was a disaster.<sup>11</sup>

Even American composers of international renown had difficulties. For example, Elliott Carter completed his *Variations for Orchestra* in 1955, but it was not programmed by the New York Philharmonic until 1972. As Charles Rosen would later point out, Carter's international reputation had been established since 1951 with the premiere of the String Quartet No. 1. Apart from the difficulty of Carter's music and the challenge of limited rehearsal time, the Philharmonic's "neglect" of Carter amounted to nothing more than "an empty ritual," a custom rooted in a presumption of American inferiority. "That Carter should have to wait seventeen years...typical of the difficult relation of American composer and orchestra today."<sup>12</sup> David Schiff also references the protracted delay of the New York premiere of Carter's *Variations* in his monograph:

As often happens with American artists, European success eventually led to acknowledgement of Carter's standing back home. But though Carter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for the Second Quartet, conductors in America remained hostile and orchestral performances scarce. The New York Philharmonic, for instance, did not play the *Variations* until 1972.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kyle Gann, *American Music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1984), 21.

<sup>13</sup> David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1983), 133.

Given such a state of affairs, it is not hyperbole to state that American music remained firmly second-class in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Such was the American musical climate Paul Jacobs encountered upon his return from Europe in 1960. Though he had long been an advocate for American music, the commissions Jacobs sponsored after his return to the United States symbolized a renewed commitment to its advancement. While living in France, Jacobs premiered many new works by leading European composers, and these remained in his repertoire, along with his life-long favorites, Busoni, Debussy, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky. The commissions Jacobs extended to American composers between 1960 and 1980, however, are extraordinary because nearly all of them are now considered pillars of twentieth-century American piano music. Rzewski's *North American Ballads* is one such example.

It is unknown how Jacobs and Frederic Rzewski first became acquainted. Rzewski was eight years younger than Jacobs, born in 1938 in Westfield, Massachusetts. He studied at Harvard and Princeton before traveling to Italy as a Fulbright Scholar in 1960, the same year Jacobs returned to the United States. It is possible that Jacobs learned of Rzewski through the latter's activities with the experimental electronic music improvisation ensemble *Musica Elettronica Viva*, which Rzewski co-founded with Alvin Curran, Richard Teitelbaum, and Allan Bryant. The group undertook a partial tour of the United States in 1971 that included performances in New York.

By 1977 Jacobs had contacted Rzewski with a request for a set of four pieces. Jacobs was in search of a new work to fill out an upcoming album of American piano music for Nonesuch Records, and the new pieces would accompany Aaron Copland's *Four Piano Blues* and William Bolcom's *Three Ghost Rags* on the recording. Rzewski

accepted the commission, and by February, 1978, had sent a copy of the new set to Jacobs for review, who immediately responded expressing his dissatisfaction with the work. Two days later Rzewski replied:

It is amazing how useful friendly criticism can be. Your letter arrived the day before yesterday. On reading it I was immediately aware that you were unhappy with the pieces I'd sent you. You can't imagine how depressed I felt: I thought again (for the how-manyth time) that I should give up writing music, should leave it to the real pro's.<sup>14</sup>

The exact tone of Jacobs' criticism is unclear from Rzewski's response. As will be shown, Jacobs possessed a sometimes volatile temperament, and when sufficiently riled, his verbal assaults could be devastating. Posterity should be grateful for Rzewski's deference in this instance. Reading farther into Rzewski's letter, it becomes clear that Jacobs' initial offer included several stipulations concerning the subject matter of the pieces, primarily, the use of popular themes and the expression of an American idiom:

Your letter in June to the effect that the pieces could be in any style led me to forget the original idea of popular themes, and so on. I could hardly sleep that night. I've decided to write a whole new set of pieces based on folk songs...I've already written the first one, it's called "Dreadful Memories" (based on the song by Aunt Molly Jackson), which I think may be the title of the whole group. Nor will they all be necessarily American (I have in mind one based on the Spanish Civil War song "Los 4 Generales").

The prerequisites are confirmed in a letter from Rzewski to Jacobs several months later:

If you have any further thoughts on the general character of this record (e. g. along the lines of dance music, American popular traditions, etc.) please communicate them to me – it may help to channel my energies in a constructive direction. It's useful to have a "theme."<sup>15</sup>

By June, 1979, Rzewski had finished drafting the fourth piece in the set, *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, and settled on the title of *Ballads*.

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<sup>14</sup> Frederic Rzewski to Paul Jacobs, February 15, 1978, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

<sup>15</sup> Frederic Rzewski to Paul Jacobs, May 21, 1978, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

It is likely that the first set of pieces that Rzewski sent to Jacobs were draft copies of what would eventually become *Squares*. When *North American Ballads* was published by Zen-On (Rzewski's Japanese publisher) in 1982, *Squares* was included in the volume. It is a testament to Rzewski's character that he dedicated these pieces to Jacobs, despite the fact that Jacobs had initially disapproved of them. Moreover, it is incredible when one considers that if it were not for Jacobs' hypercritical nature or had he been hesitant to express his dissatisfaction, American piano music would be without one of its finest works.

The story of another famous Jacobs commission, William Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes for Piano*, is somewhat tragic in nature, as Jacobs died before the completion of the set. To this day Bolcom continues to be one of Jacobs' greatest public advocates. He has stated repeatedly in personal communications and interviews that Jacobs deserves to be better known. The two met in France where, in addition to his other studies at the University of Washington, Mills College, and Stanford, Bolcom took three years of instruction under Milhaud and Messaien at the Paris Conservatoire from 1958 to 1961. At some point during the latter part of his time there he met Jacobs.<sup>16</sup> Bolcom also attended Boulez's lectures while in Paris. Perhaps this is what initially brought the two of them into contact. As for Jacobs, he was a champion of Bolcom's piano music in the 1970's, and completed several recordings of the *Three Ghost Rags*. Work on the *Twelve New Etudes* began in 1977. Bolcom recalls:

I was composing them for Paul Jacobs, but by the time I had completed the first nine of the twelve, Paul had become ill and could no longer play them. When he

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<sup>16</sup> Henry S. Jones, "William Bolcom's *Twelve New Etudes for Piano*" (DMA monograph, Louisiana State University, 1994), 5. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/results/6D3F58616E9647DEPQ/1?accountid=13965> (accessed October 17, 2016).

died, in 1983, I just stopped working on them. I felt blocked. I played No. 9 at the concert we gave in his memory at Symphony Space, the following year, and I thought that would be the end of them.<sup>17</sup>

It is fitting that Bolcom chose the ninth and most recently completed etude of the set, “Invention,” for his performance at the February 1984 memorial concert for Jacobs. The etudes remained unfinished until 1986, when a performance of the existing nine etudes by Marc-Andre Hamelin inspired Bolcom to renew his work:

I gave Marc-Andre the nine etudes I had completed, and he played them so beautifully that when I got home I composed the last three in a white heat, and gave him the whole set. I dedicated the etudes to Paul Jacobs, in memory, and extended the dedication to both John Musto and Marc-Andre Hamelin, because they were able to break the spell on them.<sup>18</sup>

Composer-pianist John Musto had presented three of the nine etudes in concert at New York’s The New School the same year as the Hamelin performance. As stated above, Bolcom worked quickly on the remaining three, and the completed set of twelve was published later the same year.

As in the case of the *North American Ballads*, correspondence between Bolcom and Jacobs concerning the etudes reveals the extent to which Jacobs was responsible for both the overall design of the set, and the subject matter of the individual pieces. A letter dated December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1982, accompanied a draft copy of what was likely the eighth etude. Incidentally, Bolcom’s remarks on Jacobs’ health (he had recently been diagnosed with HIV) are touching:

At least 2 or 3 came from “requests” of yours: irrational vs. rational rhythms, a rag piece – but if you have any more ideas please tell me – I have four to go. I

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<sup>17</sup> Allan Kozin, “How the Spell Was Broken for Bolcom’s Etudes,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

have ideas for them, but there are blanks in there...Joan [Morris] sends love too. Courage from us both, although you were never short on it.<sup>19</sup>

In an earlier passage from the same letter, Bolcom reflects on the etudes completed up to that point. His comments are insightful:

I have decided this nomenclature of [etudes] 2, 4, [and] 6, “Exercice de style,” is unnecessary and precious. They ALL are. Certainly this one, a dark piece. Curtis Curtis-Smith looked at them recently and said they are all obsessed with something, and that’s true. Like late Liszt.<sup>20</sup>

Even as late as June 21, 1983, Bolcom continued to work on the set:

I am thinking about our etudes, and they are taking shape. This set is more cohesive as a set than the first, possibly, in the same way that second volumes of so many works are (the WTC 48 for ex. except that in the 48 the first vol. is more varied stylistically than the 2<sup>nd</sup>, but in this case it’s the opposite).<sup>21</sup>

Here Bolcom refers to his earlier *Twelve Etudes*, composed between 1959 and 1966. The comments that the second set is both “more cohesive” yet “more varied stylistically,” and Bolcom’s remarks on the Well-Tempered Clavier are striking.

Apart from Carter’s *Night Fantasies*, the *North American Ballads* and *Twelve New Etudes* are likely Jacobs’ most significant American commissions. In addition to these, however, Jacobs was also responsible for sponsoring new works from Roger Reynolds and Charles Wuorinen. In addition, numerous letters document that Jacobs was frequently solicited by other composers who hoped that he might consider programming their works. What is incredible about all these things is that Jacobs was passionately engaged in the promotion of new American music at a time when it was just beginning to

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<sup>19</sup> William Bolcom to Paul Jacobs, December 4, 1982, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

<sup>20</sup> William Bolcom to Paul Jacobs, December 4, 1982, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

<sup>21</sup> William Bolcom to Paul Jacobs, June 21, 1983, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.



reestablish a sense of its own identity and, for perhaps the first time in history, compete on an equal footing with the music coming out of Europe.

### PAUL JACOBS

In the notes that accompany Paul Jacobs's extraordinary 1975 recording of Debussy's *Douze Etudes*, Teresa Sterne (longtime head of Nonesuch Records) wrote, "No one seriously involved with the musical scene in New York in the 1960's could fail to be aware of Paul Jacobs as an outstanding musical personality, famously witty and knowledgeable – a keen intellect and a patrician artist..."<sup>22</sup> Jacobs was a pianist who specialized in the avant-garde, possessing an insatiable interest in contemporary music that dated back to his childhood. As Jacobs later related, he developed a strong affinity for the works of Stravinsky, Debussy, and Ravel before he was fifteen.<sup>23</sup> Over the course of his career, he premiered compositions by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Hans Werner Henze, Oliver Messiaen, Roger Sessions, and Elliott Carter, among others, and commissioned new works from many of these same composers.<sup>24</sup> In addition to his involvement with the avant-garde, Jacobs was also a passionate advocate for the music of Ferruccio Busoni and an expert in baroque performance practice.

As his recordings attest, Jacobs was a pianist of formidable technical and interpretive skill, yet he rarely appears in surveys of great pianists of the twentieth century. This is not surprising given that unlike many of his contemporaries, Jacobs gravitated away from the audience-friendly, technical showpieces of the nineteenth century. In hindsight, his career was significantly handicapped by this decision. Consider

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<sup>22</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>24</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

the following excerpt from an interview with William Bolcom and Joan Morris, conducted by the pianist Mark Wait. The transcript originally appeared in a 1988 installment of *The Piano Quarterly*:

WAIT: Jacobs seems to have been one of those people who really did pay a price in his career for the music he championed.

BOLCOM: He paid the price. I read his eulogy, you know, together with Elliott Carter and someone from the New York Philharmonic. I remember saying, in effect, ‘All Paul Jacobs did was do what all the nineteenth-century pianists did, and that was play the contemporary works of [their] time. Nobody does that anymore.’ Paul was certainly aware of the price he paid. He said, ‘You know, it’s funny, I get all these wonderful reviews, but I don’t get the solo concerts. I don’t get the calls.’ Since his agent didn’t really seem to push Paul very hard, I asked him why? He replied, ‘I can’t get him a gig, nobody wants him.’ Now that wasn’t completely true. I mean, only one solo concert. One of the great pianists in the world, and only one solo concert that got reviewed! That’s ridiculous!

MORRIS: Thank God he recorded as much as he did.

BOLCOM: Yes, at least we’ve got the recordings...<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, Jacobs never achieved the kind of recognition his achievements warranted; it was a sacrifice, perhaps consciously made, in the service of his artistic convictions. As Elliott Carter once said, “Paul isn’t content to play the same pieces the same way all the time, for his own glory; what concerns him is the glory of the music.”<sup>26</sup>

Although not nearly as prolific as his contemporary Charles Rosen in terms of publishing, numerous writings and recorded lectures attest to Jacobs’ dedication to scholarly research. Some of his best writing is preserved in liner notes Jacobs wrote for many of his own recordings. “Paul’s notes for the Schoenberg [1975 recording], and for his subsequent recordings, were filled with stunning insights and colorful, fresh

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<sup>25</sup> William Bolcom and Joan Morris, interview by Mark Wait, “Meet the Composer-Pianist: William Bolcom,” *The Piano Quarterly*, no. 142 (Summer 1988): 36.

<sup>26</sup> Elliott Carter, quoted in Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

information....”<sup>27</sup> Jacobs’ academic investigations gave birth to several uncommon, yet fiercely-held, artistic convictions. As mentioned above, he believed that modern performers are obligated to practice historically informed performance; and that, rather than “specializing” in performance upon the modern concert grand, pianists should be open to diversifying their skills through the study of other keyboard instruments. In Jacobs’ view, certain segments of the modern piano repertoire present stylistic problems that are impossible to resolve without acquiring an intimate knowledge of the instruments for which they were written.

Stylistic problems have to be resolved in some cases by research – you have to find out what the performance practice was of the time and then you live with the instruments for which they were written and you understand other problems, so the idea of playing many instruments should, on the contrary, be more frequent than it is today.<sup>28</sup>

Modern day concert pianists might view this statement with skepticism, yet Jacobs continues: “The eighteenth century had keyboard players playing all kinds of different instruments: if you played the organ then you went home and practiced on the clavichord, and there are no two more different touches...” and, furthermore, “This nonsense of ‘Doesn’t it do things to your technique?’ or ‘Doesn’t it require a different discipline? or *mode de pensée*, no.’ ”<sup>29</sup> For Jacobs this was not merely a matter of historical accuracy, but a pedagogical concern. As Jacobs explains in an interview with Richard Dyer of *The New York Times*:

Students are badly taught, just as I was. They ought to learn...to master and carry over the expressive devices of the clavichord, the harpsichord, the organ— expressive devices that don’t depend on the dynamic variety that is the piano’s

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<sup>27</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

strength. And students must be trained to listen to music for what is in it, not for what is not—you can't look for faces in an abstract painting.<sup>30</sup>

A highly cultured individual, Jacobs' philosophical approach to music is a lesson for modern performers on the necessity of cultivating an appreciation and understanding of all the arts. Indeed, Jacobs' most influential teacher was not even a musician, but the obscure French painter, Bernard Saby.<sup>31</sup> Later, Aaron Copland related: "Paul Jacobs is more than a pianist. He brings to his piano playing a passion for the contemporary, and a breadth of musical and general culture such as is rare."<sup>32</sup>

Paul Jacobs was born on June 22, 1930, and grew up in the Bronx. In her remembrance, Teresa Sterne recalls that he was a "precocious" child, "reading and studying modern scores as rapidly as the local public libraries could supply them."<sup>33</sup> Jacobs' own statements concerning his childhood seem to downplay the child prodigy narrative. Yet, he also claimed that his mother decided that she would raise a pianist even before he was born. "His mother wanted him to be a prodigy like Ruth Slenczynska. 'I even auditioned for Major Bowes. I suppose I was pretty ghastly, but I did have talent.'"<sup>34</sup> His piano studies began at the early age of four and entailed at least one hour of supervised practice every day.<sup>35</sup> Despite this Jacobs confessed that his early training was not exceptional. His first teachers "were ladies who were piano teachers because they

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, "Pianist with a Passion for the New," *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>32</sup> Aaron Copland, in Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>33</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, "Pianist with a Passion for the New," *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

weren't pianists."<sup>36</sup> He later claimed to be auto didactic, perhaps in jest, or perhaps not, given that his early training appears to have been of an inferior quality.<sup>37</sup> A public performance when he was six years old was reviewed in the local papers. Encouraged by this initial success, Jacobs's mother began taking him around to various radio stations for on-air performances.<sup>38</sup> Jacobs' recollections suggest he may have harbored some resentment against his mother for her behavior during these early years.

Jacobs attended DeWitt Clinton High School, a large, all-boys school in the heart of the Bronx that counts several other notable musicians among its alumni, including film composer Bernard Hermann, songwriter Frank Loesser, and jazz pianists Bud Powell and Fats Waller. At this point in his education the quality of his music training improved with regular lessons at the historic 3<sup>rd</sup> St. Settlement Music School on Manhattan's Lower East Side, where William Kapell had studied. His other musical activities included playing timpani in the all-city orchestra. This had a profound effect on his musical journey:

"What really lead me to [contemporary music] was I got into the [all-city] orchestra as timpanist and percussionist and when you get interested in those instruments, you have to get interested in twentieth-century music."<sup>39</sup> It is probable that Jacobs' years as a percussionist, in addition to introducing him to large amounts of contemporary repertoire, helped nurture the rhythmic skills for which he would later be known as a keyboardist.

Following graduation from high school Jacobs enrolled at the Eastman School of Music, but this venture ended in disaster. "I was kicked out because of my attitude. I told all my teachers that I knew more than they did, which happened to be quite true. The only

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

new music we ever heard out there was by Howard Hanson.”<sup>40</sup> The following year he was admitted to the Juilliard School where he was one of the last students to study with Ernst Hutcheson, an Australian pianist famous for being the first pianist to perform the third, fourth, and fifth Beethoven concertos in a single concert and the author of two important books on the piano: *The Literature of the Piano* and *The Elements of Piano Technique*. Not much is known about Jacobs’ years at Juilliard, except that his studies with Hutcheson were extremely demanding; Hutcheson is reputed to have required at least four hours a day of practice from his students in addition to regular attendance at recitals, concerts, and operas.<sup>41</sup> Presuming that such requirements were followed, Jacobs’ already broad knowledge of the concert music canon was undoubtedly enriched by the experience.

Following his graduation from Juilliard in 1951 and his solo debut at New York’s Times Hall, Jacobs left the United States. His decision to go abroad was supported by his parents, who had spent some time vacationing in Paris in 1929 and often spoke warmly of their trip during Jacobs’ youth.<sup>42</sup> As it turned out, Jacobs’ Parisian vacation (it was originally conceived as a ten-week holiday) was profoundly important for his career.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, he stayed in Europe for nine years. His living situation was far from ideal, however. Remuneration for performances on German and French radio was extremely low. “I got \$5 a performance; later, when I played the premiere of the Henze Piano Concerto, they raised me to \$25 ‘because of the special difficulty of the piece.’” Jacobs

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>41</sup> National Portrait Gallery, “Ernest Hutcheson, 1871-1951,” National Portrait Gallery of Australia, <http://www.portrait.gov.au/people/ernest-hutcheson-1871> (accessed September 13, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

continues, “I lived in a hotel with a window facing a wall, so that I had to go outside to see what the weather was. There was room only for a bed and a piano and a little alcohol burner to make stew on.”<sup>44</sup> He had little money, but the creative environment in Paris was enriching. During those first years in France, Jacobs came into contact with some of the people who would be most influential in shaping his artistic outlook. Jacobs later recalled:

I had one extraordinary teacher who influenced me very deeply, the painter Bernard Saby, who is unknown, a French painter who died last summer [1975] and he was a highly intelligent person, about everything, and just seeing enough of him and talking to him about music, painting, literature, about the world, made me think about things perhaps. I knew him in France, he was a good friend of mine. I knew him through Boulez. He didn’t know much about how to play Beethoven but I could play for him and ask him “What’s going on here, is it coming through... what do you hear?”<sup>45</sup>

Saby was most influential in shaping Jacobs’ aesthetics. The relationship with Pierre Boulez, however, did more to advance Jacobs’ career as a pianist, though it put an end to his career as a composer. “I had wanted to be a composer, but I just gave it up. I wouldn’t have dared to show anything of mine to Boulez.”<sup>46</sup> Their association began in an astonishing way, as recounted in Joan Peyser’s biography of Boulez. Jacobs was preparing an interview with Boulez for the English music journal *The Score*, and by chance Boulez was in need of a pianist for an upcoming performance of the *Domaine Musical*. “Boulez had heard Jacobs play the year before, but had assumed then that Jacobs was touring Europe. When the pianist told him he had settled in Paris, Boulez handed him a pile of scores and said they were to be played in ten days.”<sup>47</sup> Jacobs recalls,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>47</sup> Joan Peyser, *Boulez* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), 110.

“It was an immense program – almost five hours – which included Berg’s *Lyric Suite*, pieces by Webern and Bartok... There was too much on one program but Boulez often made that mistake.”<sup>48</sup> Jacobs later spoke about Boulez’s influence:

Boulez was an influence in my life, I think... I saw how necessary it was to take a polemical stand on what one believed in as being right for the present times. One couldn’t necessarily influence it but one could stand up for what one believed and denounce what one didn’t.<sup>49</sup>

The relationship between Jacobs and Boulez cooled somewhat at the end of Jacobs’ time in Paris. There were rumors of a falling out because Jacobs had declined to premiere Boulez’s Second Piano Sonata. The two were eventually reconciled, however. During his tenure with the New York Philharmonic, Boulez acknowledged that “[Jacobs] is a man of enormous qualities. From the orchestra’s point of view a musician like him is a great asset, especially in baroque and contemporary music because he knows everything; I need him.”<sup>50</sup> In Paris, the connection with Boulez brought Jacobs into contact with many important young composers including Richard Rodney Bennett, with whom Jacobs developed a close relationship. Bennett’s *Cycle 2 for Paul Jacobs* was premiered by the dedicatee in 1958.

Jacobs appeared regularly at the International Society for Contemporary Music in both Italy and Austria and the International Vacation Courses for New Music at Darmstadt, which at that time was held every summer; it was in Darmstadt in 1957 that Jacobs premiered Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*. The year before, Jacobs had achieved prominence for being the first pianist to present a recital of Schoenberg’s complete works

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



for solo piano. A recording of these works followed soon after. Jacobs later asserted that “[The] five books of pieces are as important to contemporary piano technique as the Chopin Etudes were to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>51</sup> Jacobs’ professional activities were not limited to performing and recording, however. He served as record producer for the conductor René Leibowitz, supervising the first LP recording of Schoenberg’s *Gurre Lieder*.

Following his return to the US in 1960, Jacobs participated in the Seminar in Advanced Music Studies at Princeton University, and in the same year was hired by Leonard Bernstein to serve as orchestral pianist for the New York Philharmonic. “One day he walked into a Philharmonic rehearsal and Bernstein said ‘What are you doing here?’ ‘I’m back,’ Jacobs responded.”<sup>52</sup> Such was the beginning of Jacobs’ relationship with the New York Philharmonic, a position he held until his death in 1983. In 1974, he became the Philharmonic’s harpsichordist as well. He played in numerous new music ensembles including the Composer’s Forum, Robert Craft’s Chamber Art Society, Gunther Schuller’s Contemporary Innovations, Arthur Weisburg Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, and the Fromm Fellowship Players at Tanglewood. Jacobs went on to teach at Tanglewood, Mannes College, and the Manhattan School of Music, and in 1968, he was appointed to his last teaching position as Associate Professor of Music at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. While at Brooklyn College, Jacobs “organized and presented...an adventurous concert series of chamber music and solo

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Jacobs, Liner notes to Arnold Schoenberg, *Piano Music*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 9 71309-2, 1988, CD.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

repertory.”<sup>53</sup> It was also during this time that Jacobs began to be sought out as a coach for ensembles and pianists preparing challenging twentieth century works.

Jacobs’ career coincided with the height of experimentalism in American music. He did not, however, include many experimentalist works in his repertoire, though he did champion a number of Stockhausen’s piano compositions.<sup>54</sup> Surprisingly, later in his career Jacobs referred to himself as conservative in musical taste, because, as he explained, he was most attracted to music still belonging within the Western classical tradition:

There are many experiments that are taking place today that I may find interesting, successful, but I don’t find them projected along the line that I am most sympathetic to and therefore I can’t say that, as interested and taken in by it as I am, it’s not the music that touches me most deeply.<sup>55</sup>

Jacobs was also a strong proponent of programming piano transcriptions. He is known for his recording of Busoni’s transcriptions of Bach, but a large number of orchestral transcriptions were included in his repertoire. His philosophy regarding transcriptions was founded upon their historical significance, as he later explained:

Before the introduction of the phonograph, the dissemination of orchestral music was necessarily done by way of the piano transcription. Remember, for instance, Schumann’s long essay on Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) for which he used not the orchestral score, which by 1835 was still unavailable to him, but rather the Liszt piano version which had been published two years before.<sup>56</sup>

Jacobs cites other examples: *Le sacre du printemps*, and two piano reductions of Mahler symphonies, used in performances for Schoenberg’s 1918-1921 “Society for Private

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<sup>53</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Jacobs and Gilbert Kalish premiered George Crumb’s *Celestial Mechanics* (Makrokosmos IV) at Alice Tully Hall in November of 1979. Jacobs also appears on recordings of Morton Feldman’s music.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Jacobs, Liner notes to Stravinsky, *Music for Four Hands*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, and Ursula Oppens, piano, Arbiter 155, 2008, CD.

Musical Performances.” As a duo pianists, Jacobs often collaborated with Gilbert Kalish and Ursula Oppens. Oppens would later relate, “[Jacobs] was a mentor to me. When I began to play ‘new music’, people would comment that there were too many playing it. Paul instead said ‘How wonderful.’”<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned above, Jacobs established a special identity with the music of Busoni, recording not only the Bach and Brahms transcriptions, but also the six sonatinas and the *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* with Oppens. Just before his death, he told Teresa Sterne, “I was absolutely drawn in by [Busoni’s] fantastic sense of harmony. And there’s an emotional range that I find absolutely unique. There’s no question about it – Ferruccio Busoni is the great underrated master of the twentieth century.”<sup>58</sup>

The handful of recordings left behind by Jacobs is a testament to his virtuoso technique, showcasing his unique sound and brilliant interpretative skill. He was capable of playing with great speed, displaying remarkable evenness in difficult passagework, and he possessed an uncanny ability to execute rhythmically dense textures with precision. However, it was more often his dynamic shading and convincing interpretations that won him praise from critics. “Jacobs produces a seemingly limitless spectrum of gradations, from barest audibility to stentorian loudness... More wondrous still are his powers of persuasion – so firm are his convictions about this repertoire that one begins to share them through his playing.”<sup>59</sup> The following passage from Bolcom is a testament to just how persuasive Jacobs could be in performance:

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<sup>57</sup> Ursula Oppens, quoted in Allan Evans, Liner notes to Stravinsky, *Music for Four Hands*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, and Ursula Oppens, piano, Arbiter 155, 2008, CD.

<sup>58</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>59</sup> Alan M. Kriegsman, “The Dynamic Pianism of Paul Jacobs,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 1977, accessed November 6, 2015, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

What I really loved about Paul was that he not only played music of our time brilliantly. He could also redefine some of the traditional literature. I went to a concert of his once in which he played the complete Schoenberg... His Schoenberg was glorious. What I loved about the Schoenberg was that Jacobs understood its wit. I mean, the Opus 25 Suite, which I used to hate, Jacobs made funny. Its cartoons with little mechanical things going on. I love that. There was a cartoonist in Schoenberg. And Jacobs made me see that.<sup>60</sup>

Carter offered the following insight into Jacobs' interpretive method: "Paul Jacobs is a most remarkable performer. He is very concerned to find out the identity of a score, to enter into it by careful study and imaginative recreation, and to drive his performance from that."

As a teacher, Jacobs was demanding. As mentioned earlier, he was a strong proponent of the study of a wide range of keyboard instruments, believing that each instrument presents unique problems, the working-out of which yields valuable insights for performance on any instruments. He railed against the idea that pianists should not study the harpsichord because of the "special techniques" required:

Special techniques? *All* music requires special techniques. At this point I doubt I could play the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto on just a week's notice because of those chains of octaves. For my purposes it is important to be able to control dynamics from the surface of the keys, to gain the finger independence that polyphonic music teaches and demands, to learn to think in orchestral terms so that I can clarify details of texture. I also had to learn different hand displacements, for in atonal music there is no duplication of hand position in different octaves—unless your name is Bucquet.<sup>61</sup>

Jacobs also emphasized independence of the mind in his teaching, "His method is to force his students to think for themselves, to work out solutions to their own problems," and intentionality, "Be *aware*, don't leave anything up to the fingers alone. Music is a

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<sup>60</sup> William Bolcom and Joan Morris, interview by Mark Wait, "Meet the Composer-Pianist: William Bolcom," *The Piano Quarterly*, no. 142 (Summer 1988): 36.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, "Pianist with a Passion for the New," *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

dramatic way of presenting ideas.”<sup>62</sup> Based on Dyer’s account, Jacobs’ classroom teaching would have been an awe-inspiring experience for any serious music student.

Jacobs interrupted his constant stream of questions only when he sat down at the piano to illustrate a student’s answer—with a Bach fugue, a Schoenberg canon, or the overture to “Don Giovanni”; his hands arched across the air to demonstrate visually the imitative entries of a canon; his voice rose when he spoke of the ‘drama’ and ‘excitement’ that come from the complexity of a musical event and its rate of change.<sup>63</sup>

His passionate nature revealed itself not only through performance and teaching, but permeated every aspect of his life, sometimes to a fault. He was extremely opinionated and occasionally intractable, “Paul Jacobs has strong opinions about film music, about cooking, about painting, about Fred and Ginger, about books, about new techniques of playing 20<sup>th</sup> century music.”<sup>64</sup> These strong opinions, coupled with a volatile temper, occasionally landed him in trouble. Several cases are documented in Jacobs’ personal letters. One such incident was a dispute with the dean of music at Brooklyn College, whom Jacobs accused of personal bias. Jacobs’ complaints included repeated assignments to teach lower-level courses and lack of fair consideration for promotion.

The passage below is from Jacobs’ letter to the dean:

How did you expect me to take the news that Aneevas was appointed Full Professor on a tutorial basis, while I was relegated to the salt mines and 1.3 forever? Didn’t it ever occur to you that ~~all considerations of his mediocrity apart~~, I would be insulted?

I have many other points to discuss with you but in my anger and haste, I feel that I had better stop.<sup>65</sup>

Jacobs did not shy away from such confrontations. The letter quoted above followed what must have been a rather unfriendly conversation over the phone: “It is considered

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Jacobs to Dorothy, June 28, 1979, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

rude to hang up on someone. You did not have a meeting, you were out to a 100 proof lunch.”<sup>66</sup>

Jacobs also appears to have been especially difficult in his dealings with Stonington, CT-based harpsichord maker David Jacques Way. This is hardly surprising given Jacobs’ passion for historical keyboard instruments. The circumstances of their disagreement revolved around the sudden death in 1976 of famed harpsichord builder William Hyman, whom Jacobs had contracted to build two custom-made instruments, a muselaar (virginal) and a Flemish double harpsichord. Jacobs did not hesitate to express his displeasure at the prospect of Way, who was Hyman’s understudy, completing *his* instruments. Way wrote to Jacobs:

I have enormous respect for your musical ability, but no reason to approve you otherwise. Evidently, from our last conversation, you have no reason to respect me for anything. Let’s leave it that way...

All further work done on your instrument represents for me a complete loss, and you have made it clear that I cannot even expect your good will and good report.<sup>67</sup>

Understandably, Jacobs was concerned about the investment he already made and the quality of the craftsmanship, but his behavior towards Way showed a lack of sympathy and patience at best.

An infamous incident of Jacobs’ more pugnacious side involved the much-publicized New York debut of French pianist Marie-Françoise Bucquet (currently professor of piano at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris), who for her debut chose a program that featured Iannis Xenakis and Schoenberg’s complete works for solo piano. Jacobs was in attendance:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> David Way to Paul Jacobs, October 19, 1976, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

The French lady had improvised ‘80 percent’ of the music and failed to understand the polyphonic structure, the harmonic rhythm, of the 20 percent she did get ‘right.’ ‘In the Xenakis piece she got lost with the music right there in front of her. She would stop at the bottom of a page, turn, find her place again, and head off.’<sup>68</sup>

In the days following the recital, Jacobs expressed his displeasure to several critics who had praised Bucquet’s performance.

When I called a prominent New York City music critic, he said ‘Oh, you people with access to the scores!’ Access to the scores! Schoenberg’s piano music has been in print for 40 years—and it is conceded to be important. No critic would confess to ignorance of the Beethoven piano sonatas, and there are 32 of them and they last 14 hours. There are only 50 minutes of music by Schoenberg. Can a critic not learn that much in his lifetime? After all, that’s his profession.<sup>69</sup>

Along with his professional polemics, Jacobs’ occasionally displayed extreme behavior in his personal life. Some of the more interesting accounts come from Richard Rodney Bennett, who, Jacobs’ junior by seven years, recalled being shocked at his initial encounters with the man. By the time of their introduction, Jacobs had already firmly established himself in Paris, and his international profile was on the rise. Bennett recalls that Jacobs experimented with drug use, and had a number of dramatic affairs over the years, all of which ended in disaster. His romantic life seems to have stabilized after his return to the United States, however, when Jacobs met physics professor Paul Levenson. They remained partners for 22 years, and Levenson was executor of Jacobs’ estate.

In 1982, Jacobs was diagnosed with HIV. He was among the earliest, prominent figures in the arts community to succumb to the disease, dying on September 25, 1983.

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Richard Dyer, “Pianist with a Passion for the New,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

The obituary which appeared in the New York Times, which mentioned nothing of his homosexuality or his surviving partner Levenson, was later used as an example of the press's unwillingness to openly acknowledge the fact of homosexuality nor the impact that HIV was wreaking upon the homosexual community. A memorial concert for Jacobs was presented February 24, 1984. Carter was one of the eulogists. Two new works dedicated to Jacobs were premiered, one each by David Schiff and William Bolcom, who later said, "I believe [Jacobs] to have been the greatest pianist of our age, certainly the greatest I ever knew; he will be, I am certain, one of the very few among the many thousands of twentieth century pianists that has a chance of being remembered years from now."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> William Bolcom, quoted in Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.



### CHAPTER III

#### JACOBS AND ELLIOTT CARTER

The author of this study has not been able to discover how Jacobs and Carter first became acquainted. Carter “recalled hearing Jacobs play at the Dartington Hall Summer Music School in England, where ‘Paul performed, among other things, one of the piano parts of Stravinsky’s two piano concerto with a verve that brought forth praise from the composer, who was present.’”<sup>71</sup> It is also possible that their formal introduction was made through Paul Fromm, because after Jacobs’ return to the United States the Carters funneled financial support to him through the Fromm Foundation in the form of yearly merit-based grants.<sup>72</sup>

Whatever the circumstances of their initial acquaintance, Jacobs and Carter quickly became close associates. It was Jacobs who took over the harpsichord part in Carter’s *Double Concerto* when Ralph Kirkpatrick was forced to resign due to his deteriorating eyesight. According to Teresa Sterne, this “cemented an enduring collaboration between Jacobs and the composer.”<sup>73</sup> Not only did the two collaborate on Carter’s music, but it was Carter who assisted Jacobs in making corrections to the first edition of Schoenberg’s complete works, the same scores that were used in Jacobs’ 1975

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<sup>71</sup> Elliott Carter, quoted in Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Fromm to Paul Jacobs, December 31, 1964, Paul Jacobs Collection, New York Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, New York.

<sup>73</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to Claude Debussy, *Etudes for Piano, Books 1 and 2*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 79161, 1987, CD.

Schoenberg recording.<sup>74</sup> They also shared a love of historical keyboard instruments. A clavichord kept in Carter's composers' retreat in Waccabuc, New York, was a gift from Jacobs.<sup>75</sup>

Carter completed only two solo piano works during Jacobs' lifetime: the Piano Sonata (1945-1946) and *Night Fantasies* (1979-1980). The thirty-five year gap that separates these two monumental works is curious, and Carter never offered an explanation for what seems to have been his lack of interest in writing for solo piano, even though the instrument plays a considerable role in the chamber and orchestral works that appeared during the same time period.

The handful of smaller-scale character pieces that comprise the remainder of Carter's solo piano output appeared later in Carter's career and more than a decade after Jacobs' death. The first of these was *90+*, which was published in 1994. Thankfully, however, Jacobs left behind recordings of the two earlier works, which are by far the most ambitious of Carter's solo piano compositions. In addition, Jacobs appears in early recordings of the Sonata for Cello and Piano, Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord, and the *Double Concerto*. Jacobs' status as one of the first authorities on Carter's music was recognized during his lifetime; he is listed among those who read and offered revisions to a draft version of David Schiff's monograph, *The Music of Elliott Carter*.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Paul Jacobs, Liner notes to Arnold Schoenberg, *Piano Music*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra Nonesuch 9 71309-2, 1988, CD.

<sup>75</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

## JACOBS' INFLUENCE ON CARTER

Jacobs' adroit execution of rhythmic complexities meant that he was perfectly suited to Carter's music. His abilities may have even encouraged Carter to push the boundaries of rhythmic complexity, though later on in his career Carter backed away from more difficult cross rhythms. Jacobs' influence is most clearly evidenced in the two large orchestral works that Carter completed during Jacobs' tenure as pianist with the New York Philharmonic: the *Concerto for Orchestra*, and *A Symphony for Three Orchestras*. Jacobs' personal score for *A Symphony for Three Orchestras* with his markings is included within his archive at the New York Library for the Performing Arts. Both Sterne and David Schiff maintain that the piano parts in the two orchestral works listed above were "written with Jacobs's extraordinary abilities in mind."<sup>77</sup> Schiff affirms this assertion in his monograph:

The brilliant and fiendish piano writing in the Concerto [for Orchestra] was Carter's homage to the virtuosity of the Philharmonic's pianist, Paul Jacobs... The rhythmic complexity of the piano part not only exploits Jacob's particular mastery of polyrhythm, but also allows the conductor – who may be less comfortable with metrical intricacies – to follow the pianist through many of the work's more difficult tempo modulations...<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the "fiendish" piano writing in the two orchestral works mentioned above, on more than one occasion Carter hinted that the individual talents of the pianists responsible for the commissioning of *Night Fantasies* were in his mind during its composition. "Carter told the [four] pianists that the new work would contain passages particularly suited to their musical personalities...."<sup>79</sup> However, any attempt to associate

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<sup>77</sup> Teresa Sterne, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs, The Legendary Busoni Recordings*, performed by Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 124, 2000, CD.

<sup>78</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 247. The connection between Jacobs and these pieces is noted again later in the monograph, "[Jacobs] has also recorded the virtuoso piano parts written especially for him in the *Concerto for Orchestra* and *A Symphony of Three Orchestras*," Schiff, 313.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

specific elements or sections of the work with any one of the four commissioners would be pure guesswork.

### PROBLEMS OF ACCESSIBILITY

Strong, commanding works of art, no matter how strange they seem on their first appearance, sooner or later reach the public. Their intrinsic quality acts as a centripetal force that first educates the musical profession and finally the public to understand.

-Elliott Carter, *A Further Step*

Carter's Piano Sonata, written years before Carter had come into his full maturity, is a formidable work. In contrast to many of Carter's mature works, however, it is an easier piece for audiences because it features easily discernable pitch centers and lengthy passages of pan-diatonicism. A number of modern pianists include it among their repertoire. *Night Fantasies*, written almost thirty-five years later and in Carter's mature style, is more challenging for both audience and performer. It is an extremely difficult work technically, texturally dense and highly dissonant. Additionally, the architecture of its musical structure is not immediately clear.

The rhythmic innovations for which Carter is primarily known, which are on full display in *Night Fantasies*, have proven sufficient to cement his legacy. And as Charles Rosen has stated, technically difficult music such as Carter's tends to have greater staying power.<sup>80</sup> Yet, in writings and recorded lectures, Rosen repeatedly predicted that Carter would assume a place among the great composers of the twentieth century, and that his music would be performed and studied by future generations. Today, Carter is certainly admired, studied, and performed, but he has not yet gained the level of prominence predicted by Rosen.

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<sup>80</sup> Charles Rosen, "The Challenges of Modernist Music," August 1, 2012, YouTube video, 1:35:52, Posted July 19, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geyRVsZqyyc>

The inaccessibility of *Night Fantasies*, or any mature work by Carter, results not from artifice, but from Carter's sincere aesthetic convictions. As Gann states, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, "Carter has never explored his complex systems in the spirit of pure sonic experimentation...but always in the service of a wider, philosophic programmatic speculation, often with literary associations."<sup>81</sup> Carter's "complex systems" are an outgrowth of his interest in philosophical issues, especially properties of time.

As will be shown below, complex contrapuntal-rhythmic devices are fundamental to Carter's mature music. They are employed in both background and foreground layers, contributing to a music that is inherently challenging for listeners.<sup>82</sup> Elaborate rhythmic structures are joined with unique harmonic schemes, all the while shaped by Carter's over-arching obsession with the creation of musical oppositions. The resulting music is sometimes difficult to comprehend, and can often seem chaotic. It is worth noting, however, that Carter himself believed in the presence of a boundary that could not be crossed, the existence of "certain limits beyond which art could not go without destroying itself and becoming meaningless."<sup>83</sup> Carter's thoughts in this vein echo Schoenberg's writings in their emphasis on comprehensibility, and reveal his concern for musical intelligibility. As Carter himself has stated, even in aurally challenging music, the possibility for the listener to recognize interrelations between sounds is crucial for communicating on a higher artistic level, that is, beyond mere sensuous experience.<sup>84</sup> Contrary to what many may believe, Carter's intent is never to confound the listener. The

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<sup>81</sup> Gann, *American Music in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 116.

<sup>82</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 69.

<sup>83</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Elliott Carter, *The Writings of Elliott Carter: An American Composer Looks at Modern Music*, ed. Else Stone and Kurt Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 220-221.

problem of accessibility, therefore, results not from incomprehensibility, but rather unfulfilled expectations. Rosen explains the phenomenon thusly:

The difficulty of listening to Carter is an illusory one. It is sometimes said it is impossible to hear all those notes. Actually, you can hear more of the notes in Carter's music than you can in that of Richard Strauss... The difficulty with Carter stems not from hearing what is there, but more from not hearing what you expect to hear because it is not there.<sup>85</sup>

What are these things that are "not there"? For Rosen, foremost among these is the absence of symmetrical or classically modeled phrases. Alban Berg wrote on the issue of accessibility and asymmetrical phrasing in Schoenberg's music, and his observations are equally applicable to Carter's music:

To understand this language in its entirety and details means recognizing the entrance, duration, and end of all melodies, hearing the simultaneous sounding (*Zusammenklang*) of the voices not as random occurrences, but as harmonies, and experiencing the small and large concatenations and contrasts as such.<sup>86</sup>

Berg explains that the "free construction" of phrases is the primary source of difficulty.<sup>87</sup> In avoidance of "thematic structure built on two or four measures," composers may create difficulties for listeners.<sup>88</sup>

Berg's statements resonate with Rosen's explanation of phrasing concerns in Carter's music. Moreover, Rosen has written that the originality of Carter's phrasing is particularly troublesome for pianists, as Carter employs a totally "unclassical" conception of phrasing. "The phrasing in the Piano Sonata, and in all of Carter's later pieces, may be called unclassical. The reason for this is very simple. If the bar line is not determined by

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<sup>85</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Alban Berg, "Why is Schoenberg's Music So Hard to Understand?" in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988): 60.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 62-63.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

dominant-tonic harmony, it must be determined by accent.”<sup>89</sup> Rosen continues, “With classical phrasing the regular metric pulse as well as the harmony pull toward the next measure, while Carter has to supply that kind of pull with rhythmic accents.”<sup>90</sup>

Articulating the phrases in a Carter score, therefore, requires the performer to bring extra attention to the precise execution of rhythm and accents. A casual attitude toward the execution of these elements will result in indistinct phrase structures, and increase the demands placed on the listener.

Ultimately, the problem of accessibility in Carter’s music issue is relevant because though it is challenging, the music can be deeply rewarding for those who seek to understand its logic. For Carter’s music to reach a wider audience, however, a greater number of well-informed performances and the establishment of some fundamental paradigms of interpretation are required. With respect to interpretation, recent scholarship by John Link and others has helped to clarify some matters. Yet, difficulties remain, especially if one compares Link’s analyses with claims made in more recent studies. Jacobs’ over twenty-year association with Carter and his music makes him an authority on the matter, and a close look at Jacobs’ legacy and the Carter scores that were in his possession, proposes solutions to several unresolved questions.

#### BRIEFLY, CONCERNING CARTER’S PIANO SONATA

Like *Night Fantasies*, the Piano Sonata appeared at a pivotal moment in Carter’s career. Unfortunately, it remains somewhat neglected by both scholars and performers. Many innovative elements found in the Piano Sonata have simply been “overlooked” or

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<sup>89</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

deemed insignificant.<sup>91</sup> As Wierzbicki writes, “Commentators who focus exclusively on the rhythmic aspects of Carter’s music tend to miss the point of the overtly dramatic ‘changes of character in music’ that Carter had been trying to realize ever since his 1945-46 Piano Sonata.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Schiff writes that (along with the music Carter composed for the ballet *Minotaur*) the Piano Sonata “announces the later Carter’s characteristic scope, density, and tone...”<sup>93</sup> *Night Fantasies* was a culminating moment, the end of a thirty-five-year journey of stylistic exploration, but the Piano Sonata was the point of departure. “The Sonata has special significance. Composed in 1945 and 1946, it bears witness to the moment when Carter started inventing his musical language, and it does so in a way that is extraordinarily interesting.”<sup>94</sup>

Though Schiff points to the Piano Sonata as “the greatest achievement of Carter’s early years” because “in its unique synthesis of instrumental treatment and temporal design, it leads directly to the concerns and discoveries of the works of Carter’s maturity,” most scholars identify the Cello Sonata, in particular its first movement, or the String Quartet No. 1 as the works that announce the emergence of Carter’s mature style.<sup>95</sup> As Wierzbicki states, the String Quartet No. 1 is the first work to explore “simultaneous idea differentiated not just by gesture but also by speed.”<sup>96</sup> Whatever the case, it can safely be said that innovations which are now identified with Carter’s mature style appeared gradually, first with the Piano Sonata, increasingly in the Cello Sonata, and ultimately, fully manifested in the String Quartet No. 1. “The Sonata is...moving toward the cyclical structure of the First Quartet, where it expresses the infinite cycle and

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<sup>91</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 39.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>93</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 76.

<sup>94</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 123.

<sup>96</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 44.



recycling of life, the *commodius vicus* of recirculation ‘Finnegan begin again’ that Carter admired in *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>97</sup> The approach to rhythm and harmony in mature works such as *Night Fantasies* is rooted in these earlier pieces.<sup>98</sup>

The sonata was Carter’s first published work for solo piano. Yet Carter had written much for the instrument prior to the sonata. Schiff characterizes Carter’s choral work, *Emblems*, as a sort of “concerto for piano and chorus,”<sup>99</sup> and the unique textures that distinguish the Piano Sonata are nascent in Carter’s early works for voice and piano, such as the *Three Poems of Robert Frost* and the more technically challenging *Warble for Lilac Time*.<sup>100</sup> “The piano part of “Warble for Lilac Time”... firmly established the sonorous use of the entire keyboard with which Carter abolished the spinet style of neo-classical piano writing.”<sup>101</sup> “If we compare Carter’s Sonata...with the sonatas of the 1930’s – that is, with the sonatas of Stravinsky, Copland, and Hindemith – we can see an attempt to recover the romantic quality of the piano.”<sup>102</sup>

A grant from the Guggenheim Foundation gave Carter the financial security to focus on the Piano Sonata. Carter explained his initial idea for the piece:

The Piano Sonata was a work in which I tried very hard to deal with the sound of the contemporary modern piano – that is, the large concert grand with eighty-eight keys – its sonority and its varied possibilities of touch and pedaling, and even of overtones. I was very much concerned with making the piano the center and having the music come out of that.<sup>103</sup>

The piano held special interest for Carter, “I felt that the piano was like Montaigne – a man with many various changes of character and feeling (*l’homme ondoyant et*

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<sup>97</sup> Lloyd Schwartz, Liner notes to Elliott Carter, *The Minotaur*, New York Chamber Symphony, conducted by Gerard Schwarz, Elektra Nonesuch 79248-2, 1990, CD.

<sup>98</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 56.

<sup>99</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>102</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Carter, in Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 33.

*divers*);”<sup>104</sup> the foundation was laid for the revolutionary stylistic transformations soon to come:

By the time I composed the Piano Sonata I was really trying to achieve individualization of the instrument, and actually it was not long before I began to feel that this was such an interesting idea – that I could create conflicts between two kinds of instruments with different kinds of expression and ways of being played.<sup>105</sup>

The idea of “conflicts between...instruments,” a key element of Carter’s mature style, would be fully codified in Carter’s next work, the Cello Sonata.

As in all of Carter’s mature works, the Piano Sonata does not employ thematic development in the traditional sense. Moreover, its “themes” are not even melodic, but emerge from “abstract material – intervals, chords, arpeggios. Out of this atomic matter, the music derives constantly new variations...”<sup>106</sup> They are derived from the sonic qualities of the piano itself. “Deriving themes from the actual sound is a very extraordinary development in the history of music, and one which Carter’s subsequent compositions extend in an even more radical way.”<sup>107</sup> Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the Piano Sonata is important because of the way it begins to explore musical oppositions, though these are not the same sort of oppositions of instrument and demeanor that Carter will pioneer in the first string quartet. Nonetheless, “in each movement, an initial gesture – a tempo, a color, a harmony – is interrupted by its virtual opposite.”<sup>108</sup> Opposition is most clearly manifested in the harmonic sphere; it is B Major versus B-flat Major. Carter’s themes, derived from stacked fifths, facilitate this opposition because resultant harmonies may be resolved to either B Major or B-flat

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 33, 37.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>106</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 125.

<sup>107</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 10.

<sup>108</sup> Lloyd Schwartz, Liner notes to Elliott Carter, *The Minotaur*, New York Chamber Symphony, conducted by Gerard Schwarz, Elektra Nonesuch 79248-2, 1990, CD.

Major. Though the harmonic aspects of the sonata are often neglected, the rhythmic aspects have received some attention.<sup>109</sup> The sonata “overcome[s] the confinements of regular meter.”<sup>110</sup> Meter changes occur so frequently in the sonata that on the advice of his publisher Carter ultimately dropped the markings altogether.

Jacobs initially found the sonata to be old-fashioned, but later came to appreciate and even cherish the work. It appears along his 1983-issued recording of *Night Fantasies*. “‘Today,’ Paul Jacobs wrote in 1982, the Piano Sonata ‘is recognized as the finest work of Carter’s early period and as one of the strongest pieces of American music of the forties.’”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Jacobs in Lloyd Schwartz, Liner notes to Elliott Carter, *The Minotaur*, New York Chamber Symphony, conducted by Gerard Schwarz, Elektra Nonesuch 79248-2, 1990, CD.

## CHAPTER IV

### *NIGHT FANTASIES*

Carter began *Night Fantasies* in November, 1978, with much of the compositional work taking place at the American Academy in Rome, a setting that had already proven to be a fertile working environment for Carter. Two earlier major works, the Piano Concerto (1964) and *Concerto for Orchestra* (1969) were also forged there. Final work on the fair draft took place at Carter's composer's cabin in Waccabuc, New York, during April of 1980.

Paul Jacobs organized the commission, with additional funding via a grant from the American Music Center in New York City. It would be only the second work for solo piano by Carter. His previous reluctance to accept a commission for a new piano work may have arisen from a fear of offending any one of the pianists with whom he was closely associated.<sup>112</sup> The solution, therefore, was to bring together a coalition of several of these devotee-pianists. Charles Rosen, Gilbert Kalish, and Ursula Oppens joined Jacobs in support of the project. As Schiff later noted, "The very existence of four such pianists is remarkable in itself, and it indicates the extraordinary relationship that Carter has formed over the years with a large group of musicians whose performances have greatly speeded the acceptance of his music."<sup>113</sup> Oppens gave the world premiere, which

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<sup>112</sup> Ursula Oppens, Liner notes to *Elliott Carter: A Nonesuch Retrospective*, Nonesuch 7559-79922-1, 2009, CD.

<sup>113</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 313-314.

took place at the Bath Festival in the summer of 1980. Jacobs' first performance was the New York City premiere which took place at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in November, 1981.

### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Rosen came to refer to *Night Fantasies* as "perhaps the most extraordinary large keyboard work written since the death of Ravel."<sup>114</sup> Other scholars and writers have been far more restrained in their reviews, often choosing to address the work's salient features rather than venture an assessment of its artistic merit. In a review of Jacobs' New York City premiere, *New York Times* critic Edward Rothstein declines to venture judgement on the quality of Carter's new work. To his credit, however, he offers a rather insightful summary of its overall artistic effect:

The work has a manic intensity, just this side of unpleasantness that can suddenly dissolve into the comic or the cozy. Its impact lies not in individual notes, but in expressive, large-scale groupings. The texture shifts from Debussyan sonorities to crackling patter to chordal clusters. It is never simply lyrical. Indeed, like the thoughts of an insomniac, the work was impossible to grab hold of; it kept proceeding, slipping away, the ears held by its insistence, even if not grasping its structure.<sup>115</sup>

Rothstein notes the work's perplexing structure, and recognizes the explicative nature of the work's gestural "large-scale groupings." In *Night Fantasies*, these assume the role of conventional melody and musical motive.

Critic John McInerney's account of the same concert, like Rothstein's, is mostly a description of the overall impression made by Carter's work. It is noteworthy because, like so many other writers and scholars after him, McInerney seizes upon Carter's comment that in writing *Night Fantasies*, he hoped to "capture the poetic moodiness

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<sup>114</sup> Mark Swed, "'Fantasies' for the Wide-Eyed," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/10/entertainment/et-spheres10> (accessed June 30, 2016).

<sup>115</sup> Edward Rothstein, "Music: Piano Recital by Paul Jacobs," *New York Times*, November 14, 1981. <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/14/arts/music-piano-recital-by-paul-jacobs.html> (Accessed June 30, 2016).

that...I enjoy in works of Robert Schumann like *Kreisleriana*, *Carnaval*, and *Dauidsbündlertänze*.”<sup>116</sup> McInerney writes, “The voices roam the whole keyboard like the mad Kreisler, creating an increasingly unsettled atmosphere.”<sup>117</sup> In hindsight such statements likely disserved the work over time via the propagation of a fundamental misunderstanding of Carter’s reference to Schumann. *Night Fantasies* is not as explicitly programmatic as *Kreisleriana*, nor did Carter look to emulate the formal design of Schumann’s works.

The association between *Night Fantasies* and Schumann’s piano masterpieces is admittedly a vulnerability, a too-obvious point of attack for those who are less sympathetic to Carter’s mature music. In *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* David Burge seems to dismiss *Night Fantasies* for what he perceives to be a lack of differentiation in musical-character. Perpetuating the Carter-Schumann comparison, Burge argues that whereas the great achievement of Schumann’s piano cycles is the presentation of “diverse” characters within a single work of overall structural coherence, Carter’s single-movement approach is far less successful.<sup>118</sup> Burge writes, “One would like to hear Carter’s ‘Florestan’ and ‘Eusebius’ characters more clearly drawn, or, to put it in more contemporary language, one would rather not have constantly to absorb so much diverse information without structural reference points.”<sup>119</sup> Condemning the work’s abstruse design, Burge states that “a problem for many listeners, even with repeated hearings, is to

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<sup>116</sup> Elliott Carter, *Night Fantasies* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1995).

<sup>117</sup> John McInerney, “Paul Jacobs, piano: Carter *Night Fantasies*,” *High Fidelity-Musical America* 32 (March 1982): 28.

<sup>118</sup> David Burge, *Twentieth Century Piano Music* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1990), 247.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 247-248.

perceive coherent shape or growth in this piece...”<sup>120</sup> Burge later broadens his attack, and an unmistakable pejorative tone emerges:

Neither complexity nor incomprehensibility can ensure profundity, much less communication, though they may bring about a temporary awe among those who are impressed by obfuscation. Carter has a tendency...to ‘use up’ the piano too quickly, and the constant alternations in his music tend to take on a certain grayness.<sup>121</sup>

Burge’s assessment, though perfectly valid, discloses a lack of knowledge on his part regarding Carter’s compositional methods. Moreover, his cursory overview of *Night Fantasies* is an example of an unfortunate tendency on Burge’s part (which he admits) to completely dismiss works based on their failure to interest him, even though many such works have since assumed important positions within the repertoire.

Among Carter scholars, *Night Fantasies* is thought to occupy an important position in the composer’s oeuvre. As in the Piano Sonata from thirty-five years earlier, the completion of *Night Fantasies* represents a pivotal moment in the development of Carter’s style. The earlier work marked the beginning of a nearly thirty-five-year period of continual compositional innovation. *Night Fantasies*, and in particular the harmonic and rhythmic approaches it employs, represents both the culmination of that period and the initiation of a new period. After 1980, Carter continues the harmonic and rhythmic approach employed in *Night Fantasies*, though there is a discernible shift away from larger, denser compositions to a lighter, more fluid style. As many scholars have noted, Carter’s harmonic and rhythmic language post-*Night Fantasies* ceased to evolve as they had in the previous four decades. As Wierzbicki writes, “It seems that Carter, after he

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 248.

finished *Night Fantasies*, felt his lessons had finally been learned.”<sup>122</sup> Link describes *Night Fantasies* as “one of Carter’s most fascinating and important compositions,” adding that the work demonstrates “the development of harmonic and rhythmic ideas that became the foundation of [Carter’s] compositional practice throughout the 1980s and 1990s.”<sup>123</sup> Now, nearly forty years since its premiere, *Night Fantasies* is widely considered to be one of Carter’s seminal achievements.

### EXTRA-MUSICAL INFLUENCES

The formative influences that coalesce in *Night Fantasies* and Carter’s other mature works belong not only to the musical sphere, but also the realms of philosophy, literature, and the visual arts. Composer Daniel Franklin Breedon’s dissertation examines the impact of Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy upon Carter’s music. Whitehead was a member of the philosophy faculty at Harvard during Carter’s time there as an undergraduate. Carter later acknowledged, “What I could and can understand of [*Process and Reality*], along with...his other works, with their stress on organic patterns, have molded my thinking – not only about music.”<sup>124</sup> Carter himself acknowledged that he was also heavily influenced by modernist literary figures such as Marcel Proust and James Joyce, among others. *Ulysses* and the later volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu* were both published while Carter was still a teenager. The influence of Joyce was particularly strong during Carter’s youth. Among Carter’s earliest compositional efforts were several settings of Joyce’s *Chamber Music*. Influential visual artists include modernists John Marin, one of the earliest Americans to explore abstraction, and Joseph

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<sup>122</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 84.

<sup>123</sup> John Link, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” *Sonus* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 67.

<sup>124</sup> Elliott Carter, in Allen Edwards, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972), 47.



Stella, who is well known for his geometrical-abstract representations of industrial New York.

Extra-musical influences not only impact the subject matter of Carter's compositions, but also their formal designs. Schiff writes, "[Carter] has often looked to non-musical works for strategies of design different from traditional musical procedures."<sup>125</sup> One particularly illustrative example is the formal plan for Carter's *Double Concerto*, which takes its inspiration from Lucretius's *De rerum Natura* and Pope's *Dunciad*. Lucretius's work is metaphysical in nature, describing how random collisions of particles bring a universe into existence, a universe that will eventually "uncreate" itself in a kind of "inside-out retrograde" fashion.<sup>126</sup> This scheme of randomness moving toward order and finally back to randomness is paralleled in the *Double Concerto*:

The *Double Concerto*...present[s] gradually changing percussion sounds that first 'give birth' to a few musical pitches that in turn bring on the sound of the piano and then the harpsichord, which in their turn become more and more articulated and differentiated, only to sink back eventually to a more chaotic, undifferentiated state near the end.<sup>127</sup>

This is but one example of how Carter creates "new musical forms out of the manifold conflicts between order and disorder."<sup>128</sup> The inspiration for *Night Fantasies* was likewise drawn from the world of literature, specifically Robert Lowell's "Myopia: A Night." As will be shown, there are clear parallels between the character of Lowell's poem and that of *Night Fantasies*.

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<sup>125</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 209.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 208-212.

<sup>127</sup> Elliott Carter, Liner notes for Elliott Carter, *Double Concerto for Harpsichord and Piano with Two Chamber Orchestras*, performed by Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Arthur Weisberg, conductor, Paul Jacobs, harpsichord, Gilbert Kalish, piano, Nonesuch 71314, 1975, CD.

<sup>128</sup> Carter, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*, 114.

It is inaccurate and misleading to suggest, as Jeeyeon Yim does in her dissertation, that *Night Fantasies* is a musical portrait of Carter's pianist colleagues, that it is comparable in manner to Schumann's *Dauidsbündlertänze* or *Kreisleriana*.<sup>129</sup> As Schiff writes, "Carter has...denied any attempt to paint musical portraits as Schumann is said to have done. The link with *Kreisleriana* is purely conceptual."<sup>130</sup> Instead of musical portraiture, Carter's allusion to Schumann's masterworks concerns his aim to capture their atmospheres of "poetic moodiness." Rosen explains the reference in more concrete terms: "In the most recent *Night Fantasies* the reference is...to Schumann, in the transformations used and in the unusual alternation of figurations, expressive situations, and impromptu variations of character..."<sup>131</sup> It has also been suggested that there is an autobiographical element to *Night Fantasies*. This assertion is based entirely on the following excerpt from the 1989 interview with Enzo Restagno:

I have often attempted to convey in my music the presence of the subconscious and the inner life of a person. This is part of my way of thinking of life as something very complex, in which various dimensions, temporal and otherwise, are interwoven. When you're awake and active, during the day, the feeling of organization prevails; but during my nights of insomnia I realized that the sequence of ideas was less logical and less intentional, marked by curious and sudden change – to which, in the hope of falling asleep, I gave little thought. That was how I got the idea of putting those vague and unpredictable sensations into music.<sup>132</sup>

While this statement might apply to *Night Fantasies*, the broader context of the passage quoted above makes it clear that Carter is not referring to *Night Fantasies* explicitly, but to his music generally.

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<sup>129</sup> Jeeyeon Yim, "The Reciprocity of Analysis, Aesthetics and Performance in Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*" (DMA diss., Boston University, 2004), 3. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/305220439/82A70E936C44C63PQ/1?accountid=13965> (accessed October 17, 2016).

<sup>130</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 314.

<sup>131</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> Enzo Restagno, *Elliott Carter in Conversation* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1991), 83.

As in the Piano Sonata, part of Carter's inspiration is the piano itself and the idea of the piano as a spatial instrument. "The piano for Carter is the spatial instrument *par excellence*."<sup>133</sup> "Spatial" refers both to the range of the instrument and to the illusion of physical space that may be created through resonance arising from use of the pedals.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the piano's enormous range enabled Carter's harmonic plans for *Night Fantasies*; the all-interval twelve-tone chords, which are its harmonic basis, span more than five octaves. The poetic atmosphere Carter evokes in *Night Fantasies* is also reliant upon the range of the piano, because Carter's figurations frequently utilize the entire span of the keyboard. Coupled with careful use of the pedals, including the *sostenuto*, his writing makes a unique aural impression.

#### FORM: PROTOTYPES AND INFLUENCES

Schiff derives three formal prototypes used by Carter. These are based on Schiff's analyses of works Carter had completed at that time. The central aim of all three forms is progression and motion instead of resolution. They are: (1) Circular forms, in which "motion replaces resolution as aesthetic norm," and "motion itself is the music's reason for being, that its continuous journey is more important than its temporal destination." (2) Inverted arch forms that represent the opposite of additive, cumulative structures. And finally, (3) sine-wave designs characterized by oscillating patterns of rapid acceleration, climax, slowing, and subsequent acceleration.<sup>135</sup> Of these three, the form of *Night Fantasies* is best described as a circular form.

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<sup>133</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 314.

<sup>134</sup> Yim, "The Reciprocity of Analysis, Aesthetics and Performance in Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*," 23.

<sup>135</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 47-49.

The genesis of all three prototypes lies in Carter's fascination with musical time. "The formal process of a work is often the prime source of Carter's inspiration. He sees himself as a shaper of time; and the form of a piece, the way it articulates time, is its compositional essence."<sup>136</sup> Carter credited many sources for helping shape his thoughts in this area including the late works of Debussy, specifically the late sonatas and the *Douze Etudes* for piano. Noting the "remarkable overall time-sweep" in these pieces, Carter recalls, "I recall giving a lecture on these works at Princeton, in 1947, which perplexed everyone because I said that there Debussy was experimenting with a new kind of form."<sup>137</sup> The late works of Stravinsky were important models as well: "Stravinsky's works, particularly those coming after 1930, have also interested me from just this point of view."<sup>138</sup> Schiff identifies *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and the *Symphony in Three Movements* as two works that were particularly influential.

Stravinsky taught Carter that a musical work could be fragmented, yet continuous. The two met in 1962, and Carter was astonished to discover Stravinsky's compositional process, which involved literally cutting and pasting together fragments of music.<sup>139</sup> The well-known account of their meeting is particularly resonant within the context of this study. As Link has described, Stravinsky's method was exactly the kind of procedure Carter would employ in *Night Fantasies*, a compositional scheme known within the context of Stravinsky's music as "cross cutting." The device was pioneered not only in the works of Stravinsky, but also in the films of Sergei Eisenstein. "My interest and thinking about musical time were also very much stimulated by the kinds of 'cutting' and

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>137</sup> Carter, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*, 98.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>139</sup> Carter, *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, 302-303. See these pages for the full account of Carter's meeting with Stravinsky.

continuity you find in the movies of Eisenstein, particularly *Ten Days that Shook the World* and *Potemkin*.”<sup>140</sup> An altogether different approach to musical time came to Carter through the works of Conlon Nancarrow. After an initial meeting in 1948, Nancarrow sent Carter a copy of Rhythm Study No. 1. This “spurred Carter’s interest in textures in which several tempos run at the same time;” the rhythmic strategy suggested in Nancarrow’s impact manifests itself in Carter’s music through Carter’s use of polyrhythms, which are a central component of his mature style.<sup>141</sup>

### MUSICAL TIME

Carter never precisely defined what the term “musical time” meant to him, though over the course of his career he attempted to clarify his views through numerous writings and lectures. It is a fascinating subject, and one that has received considerable attention from Carter scholars. Dense prose and subtle nuance characterize much of their writings, but if one distills the extant literature on the subject, a central theme begins to emerge: human perception of the passage of time is subjective or malleable, and it is this attribute of time that most interests Carter. As Wierzbicki elegantly writes, “Meticulous realizations of sonic imagery that somehow depict the subjective ‘experience of passage’ are at the very heart of Carter’s mature music.”<sup>142</sup> And in Carter’s own words, his music explores “the most interesting aspect of [time], namely, the characteristic appearance of its passage.”<sup>143</sup>

The relativistic nature of time-perception allows for discrepancies to arise between real time and man’s subjective experience of time. Schiff describes the

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<sup>140</sup> Carter, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*, 99.

<sup>141</sup> Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*, 115.

<sup>142</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 62.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

phenomenon thusly: “The listener perceives the music in terms of the illusionistic, experiential time which the music, like a novel or a movie, projects on ‘real’ time.”<sup>144</sup> In other words, an audience’s absorption into musical time distorts their awareness of the passage of real time. Schiff describes this relationship as a unique kind of counterpoint, a dialogue between dream time and external [or clock] time.<sup>145</sup> In an April 22, 2016, conversation with piano students at the University of South Carolina, William Bolcom gave a wonderfully straight-forward illustration of the same phenomenon via the following scenario: Imagine a concert, and on the program are two works of equal duration. The first piece is vigorous, fast-paced, and the second slower moving with many held tones. After the concert the audience is asked to compare the relative lengths of the two pieces, oblivious of their equal durations. Invariably, the audience will reply that the second work was the lengthier of the two. Their experience will have been that the second work only *seemed* longer. This property of time, its subjective experience, fascinates Carter. *Night Fantasies*, along with many of Carter’s mature works, shows how Carter’s fascination is subsequently explored within a large-scale musical structure.

In order to realize his views on musical time and experience of passage in actual compositions, Carter relies heavily on a number of rhythmic devices. Among these, metric modulation is best known, having been widely adopted by composers of succeeding generations. Carter eventually came to prefer the designation tempo modulation, though it is not Carter’s term, nor did he invent the device itself.<sup>146</sup> As most Carter scholars are quick to point out, metric modulations originated in the music of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Nevertheless, within the context of Carter’s music,

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<sup>144</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 23.

<sup>145</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 46-47.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 35-38.

tempo modulation may be defined as “different rates of musical flow presented in succession;” it is related to another of Carter’s devices, the *tempo overlay*, which may be defined as “different rates of musical flow presented simultaneously.”<sup>147</sup> Regrettably, scholars have yet to adopt a consistent terminology when discussing this second concept. What Wierzbicki calls tempo overlay, Charles Rosen refers to as polytempi, and for Schiff, the same device is the cross-pulse: “The basic structural element of [Carter’s] rhythm is the cross-pulse. At almost any point at least two pulse speeds are articulated.”<sup>148</sup> This study adopts Link’s term, polyrhythm, which he succinctly defines as “a system of two or more streams of periodic *pulsations*.”<sup>149</sup> Though this concept may appear intimidating at first, there is no real difference between it and a more commonly known rhythmic device, the cross-rhythm. Cross rhythms may be understood as a local phenomenon, with pulse streams that coincide regularly at bar lines or on strong beats. They have been used throughout much of western music history. Polyrhythms, including those that assume a structural role as in *Night Fantasies*, are merely cross rhythms on a dramatically larger scale. In such long range polyrhythms, two independent pulse streams may coincide only at the beginning and end of a composition, as in *Night Fantasies*. In other more complex examples, the two streams may never coincide. Additionally, any moments of coincidence (“coincidence points”) between two parts can be incidental, or structurally significant, as in *Night Fantasies*.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, *Elliott Carter*, 63.

<sup>148</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 26. Carter often cited the influence of jazz when discussing his use of polyrhythms. The superimposition of two parts that display not only different tempi, but dramatically different rhythmic character as well, are likened to the steady beats of a rhythm section against the rhythmically free improvisations of a soloist.

<sup>149</sup> John Link, “Long-Range Polyrhythms in Elliott Carter’s Recent Music” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1994), 8. In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304119556/39D9F4D4FD6F4AD9PQ/1?accountid=13965> (accessed October 17, 2016).

Carter utilizes the rhythmic devices described above in addition to innovative formal designs to create musical *frictions* on both local and large scales. These *frictions* are sonic constructions through which Carter demonstrates the subjective nature of human experience of the passage of time. In chamber works such as the string quartets, this is easily observed on a local level through the simultaneous sounding of instruments moving at different rates of speed. *Night Fantasies* also demonstrates time-frictions in this way, but also on the larger scale. The entire work is framed by a hidden, complex polyrhythm. Two pulse streams sound simultaneously, one moving slightly faster than the other. The surface features of the composition are underpinned or mapped onto the underlying pulsations. In this way, Carter is able to explore time-frictions on multiple planes. One is the listener's experience of the music and the counterpoint of musical time versus clock time. A second plane is embodied in the polyrhythmic framework for the music itself.

#### POLYRHYTHMIC FRAMEWORK AND COLLAGE TECHNIQUE

John Link's dissertation "Long-Range Polyrhythms in Elliott Carter's Recent Music" is an exhaustive examination of structural polyrhythms in Carter's music during the 1980's, beginning with *Night Fantasies*. In addition to identifying the structural polyrhythm in *Night Fantasies* (216:175), Link describes various properties of polyrhythms, properties whose very existence may have significant implications for the interpretation of Carter's polyrhythmic music. The two properties most relevant in the case of *Night Fantasies* are, firstly, that in-phase polyrhythms are "retrograde symmetrical."<sup>150</sup> This means that an axis of symmetry exists at the exact midpoint of the two pulse streams. Second is the concept of "proximity cycles." As the polyrhythm in

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 11.



*Night Fantasies* progresses, the composite rhythm (Link's term is "resultant rhythm") of the two streams of pulsations displays patterns of convergence and divergence.<sup>151</sup> Being aware of these properties, performers have an obligation to investigate any relationships between the polyrhythm and dramatic arch of the work. "The polyrhythm serves as a kind of formal and rhythmic skeleton, marking important moments of transition or arrival, and generating a wide variety of faster rhythmic patterns that occupy the musical surface."<sup>152</sup> Points for performers to consider might include: Is the axis-of-symmetry of the two pulse streams dramatically weighty? Is there a correlation between periods of divergence or convergence and increasing or decreasing musical intensity? These questions are intended to be paradigmatic; their purpose is to propose strategies for interpretation of Carter's polyrhythmic works.

There is an inherent danger in scores as visually intimidating as Carter's *Night Fantasies*. The surface phenomena of the music can be overwhelming, foreground details concealing key structural features. However, ignorance of the polyrhythm which frames *Night Fantasies* weakens the performer's overall interpretation; Rosen writes, "Until the musicians know why these rhythms are notated the way they are it will be impossible to play the music meaningfully."<sup>153</sup> This argument is based on one's acceptance of the premise that among the performer's responsibilities is included an obligation to articulate a work's musical structure. Historically speaking, this has certainly been the case. Performers have long been trained to emphasize moments within a composition that help express its form, such as the recapitulation in a sonata-allegro, or the *stretto* within a

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>152</sup> John Link, "The Composition of Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*," 69.

<sup>153</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 11.

fugue. Highlighting these moments communicates the structure of the composition to the listener.

The idea that an in-depth understanding of the polyrhythm in *Night Fantasies* is vital to a successful performance is supported by written evidence in the scores that belonged to Jacobs, which are currently housed in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Sadly, the folder containing the personal correspondence between Jacobs and Carter concerning *Night Fantasies* has been missing from the library's archives since 2013. However, written markings in the two scores of *Night Fantasies* remaining in the archive are illuminating. One score is a facsimile of the first draft, containing numerous corrections pertaining to measure numbers, meter changes, rhythmic errors, and accidentals. The second, a copy of the first published version, includes a complete analysis of the two pulse streams of the polyrhythm, written into the score. The pitches that correspond with the faster stream are circled and numbered in red pencil, the slower stream in blue pencil. It is unclear whether the analysis is in Jacobs' handwriting or Carter's. Jacobs had a reputation for basing his interpretations on thorough analysis of the score. As Carter later stated, "Paul Jacobs is a most remarkable performer. He is very concerned to find out the identity of a score, to enter into it by careful study and imaginative recreation, and to derive his performance from that."<sup>154</sup> The fact that such a score was in Jacobs' possession is evidence that in-depth knowledge of the polyrhythm was essential to his interpretation.

Awareness of the polyrhythm is only the first step, however. As Schiff says, "Carter does not build works only out of pre-determined fixed values. He sets out values

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<sup>154</sup> Elliott Carter, in Richard Dyer, "Pianist with a Passion for the New," *New York Times*, October 27, 1974, accessed September 14, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

that will interact and transform one another.”<sup>155</sup> Performers must consider the relationship between the polyrhythm and the surface features, and strive to achieve balance between articulating the polyrhythm and preserving the continuity of the foreground gestural features.

Link’s article on the composition of *Night Fantasies* shows that Carter’s compositional process was not merely a matter of filling in the space in between the pulsations of the two streams. The polyrhythm provided a structural framework, but the gestures or musical character of the foreground was composed separately. Link writes,

Carter continued to compose a variety of individual short fragments of music throughout 1979. When he felt he had accumulated enough of them, his next task was to think about how they might be arranged to give the composition a sense of long-range continuity. At some point he began assigning a number...to more than 70 of the fragments. Then he simply pinned them to the wall of his studio and rearranged them until he found an ordering he liked.<sup>156</sup>

Though *Night Fantasies* has been criticized by some for its lack of musical diversity, Link’s research shows that from the beginning Carter planned to incorporate a great number of distinct musical characters into the work. When he was satisfied with the dramatic content, he merged the sketches of the foreground and polyrhythm. “Only after he had a clear idea of the dramatic continuity of an extended passage did Carter decide how it would be aligned with the polyrhythmic pulsations.”<sup>157</sup> The compositional process described above recalls Carter’s meeting with Stravinsky in 1962, and the cross-cutting techniques Carter observed in Stravinsky’s composing studio. However, in *Night Fantasies* the technique is not cross-cutting, but a distinctive kind of collage.

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<sup>155</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 35.

<sup>156</sup> John Link, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” 83-84.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Collage techniques figure heavily in the two major works that precede *Night Fantasies*, *Syringa*, and *A Symphony of Three Orchestras*, which Schiff describes as Carter's most complex exploration of collage technique.<sup>158</sup> *Night Fantasies* continues their pathways of exploration. When *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds* appeared in 1971, Carter seemed dismissive of collage techniques. "This kind of potpourri treatment, (now justified under the name 'collage') communicates little musically – perhaps more programmatically."<sup>159</sup> However, a close reading of Carter's words shows that he is not referring to the kind of collage employed in *Night Fantasies*, but to the sort employed by Charles Ives in the *Concord Sonata*; specifically, the interpolation of hymn tunes or folk songs, a collage of musical quotations. In his overview of String Quartet No. 3, Schiff wrote the following: "Carter was particularly interested here in developing a form that would be at once organic and fragmented... The music is at once a series of sharply contrasted moments and a continuous process."<sup>160</sup> This quote is an apt description of the collage that Carter employs in *Night Fantasies*. Though certain sections and individual musical characters return throughout the work, individual sections are often not delineated in any way; boundaries between sections are often blurred or overlapping. This is the aspect of the work that most troubled David Burge, leading him to describe the work as unstructured or amorphous.

Given what is now known about the polyrhythm that is the foundation of *Night Fantasies*, a polyrhythm with only two coincidence points, one near the beginning (mm. 3) and again in the final measure, it is illogical to make the argument that *Night Fantasies* lacks structure. One might argue that a more rigorous structural framework has never

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<sup>158</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 300.

<sup>159</sup> Carter, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*, 117n.

<sup>160</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 260.

been conceived. However, Burge is correct that from an empirical perspective, *Night Fantasies* has a certain nebulous quality that can come across as formlessness. But is this truly a deficiency, or is it a question of “difficulty...not from hearing what is there, but more from not hearing what you expect to hear because it is not there?”<sup>161</sup> Carter repeatedly stated that part of the inspiration for *Night Fantasies* came from Robert Lowell’s poem, “Myopia: A Night.” Myopia refers to the condition commonly known as nearsightedness, and Lowell’s work is indeed a series of blurred, fleeting visions; the narrator seems to hover in a semi-conscious state, leaving him susceptible to fantastic, diabolical visions. Lowell’s poem opens:

Bed, glasses off, and all’s  
Ramshackle, streaky, weird  
for the near sighted, just  
a foot away.

The narrator of the poem removes his glasses in preparation for bed. Objects within his field of vision become blurred, “streaky, weird.” Carter wished to compose something in the manner of the poem, and he seizes upon this idea. In *Night Fantasies*, separate musical characters bleed into each other, frequently overlapping. Its succession of fleeting visions are rarely clearly delineated; it is all ambiguity and blur. The obscuring of foreground structural features gives the effect of formlessness, but that is Carter’s intention; that is the artistic effect that Carter set out to capture.

## HARMONY

Serial and chance techniques, which Copland identifies in *The New Music* as the “two defining categories” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are not a part of Carter’s style, or so proclaims Schiff. Several times in his monograph he exerts extra effort to dissociate

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<sup>161</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 12.

Carter from more widely adopted twentieth-century methods.<sup>162</sup> As his style matured, Carter developed and refined his own harmonic system, a system built on the use of all possible intervals and chords, recurrent harmonic units, and what Schiff calls primal sonorities, or “basic chords that assume tonic function.”<sup>163</sup> Taken together, these things represent Carter’s strategy for “achieving tonal coherence” without relying on serial techniques. However, scholars’ analyses of the all-interval twelve-note chords used in *Night Fantasies* and other mature works reveal Carter’s indebtedness to serialism. In the all-interval twelve-note chords, which are the harmonic building blocks of *Night Fantasies*, each of the twelve pitch classes is used, and each of the eleven interval classes occur only once between adjacent pitches.<sup>164</sup> In essence, they are all-interval twelve tone rows stacked vertically, each encompassing a span of five and one-half octaves. Furthermore, the all-interval chords are subjected to serial operations. The primary form (P) may appear in retrograde (R) and inversion (I). Link also discusses two others used by Carter: a (Q) operation, which involves “exchanging the segment of an all-interval chord that precedes the interval 6 with the segment that follows it,” and one initially described by Andrew Mead as an “exchange three and nine operation...by which the order positions of the intervals three and nine are exchanged.”<sup>165</sup> Link uses the symbol theta ( $\Theta$ ) to represent this operation.

The source of the chords in *Night Fantasies* was a list of the 1,928 possible all-interval chords compiled by Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg and Melvin Ferentz in 1965. Carter writes, “I had for a long time that list of all-interval chords that was published in

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<sup>162</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 134.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>164</sup> Link, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” 69.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 13.

*Perspectives of New Music*. And I know quite well Bauer-Mengelberg who lives around the corner and whom I see often.” He continues, “I went through the Bauer-Mengelberg list and found [the interval] six in the middle and after that went through and found all these chords.”<sup>166</sup> Carter eventually chose to use only RI-invariant chords in *Night Fantasies*; RI-invariant means that performing the R and I operations on a P form will produce the original chord. Link’s research shows that Carter made this decision during the process of sketching the harmonic materials that would become the source-material for *Night Fantasies*.<sup>167</sup> “Carter treats these chords... as a repertoire of harmonic possibilities.”<sup>168</sup> Carter eventually compiled and ordered a list of 88 RI-invariant chords to be used in *Night Fantasies*. The first chord on Carter’s list is the chord that appears in the opening eleven measures of the work, and according to Link, acts as “a central referential sonority throughout the composition.”<sup>169</sup> Link thereby offers evidence supporting Schiff’s concept of the existence of primal sonorities in Carter’s harmonic system. A sketch found with Jacobs’ scores of *Night Fantasies* confirms Link’s analysis. As with the analysis of the polyrhythm found in the same score, this sketch also appears to be in Carter’s hand.

In his overview of Carter’s Piano Concerto, Schiff writes, “Every triad is associated not only with a speed, but also with a distinctive mode of presentation. Each chord generates a characteristic kind of music....”<sup>170</sup> A systematic approach linking harmonic content and musical character is a fascinating idea, and Carter employs a

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<sup>166</sup> Carter, in Link, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” 74.

<sup>167</sup> Link, “The Composition of Elliott Carter’s *Night Fantasies*,” 76.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>170</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 232.

somewhat similar approach in *Night Fantasies*. He emphasizes certain interval classes within a given section.<sup>171</sup> Link explains:

One of Carter's earliest and most important harmonic ideas was to highlight smaller collections that feature a particular interval class. Throughout the year and a half he worked on the piece, Carter made frequent sketches marked "1/11," "2/10," "3/9," "4/8," or "5/7" indicating the interval class a given sketch is meant to highlight.<sup>172</sup>

Association between interval class and musical character in *Night Fantasies* is an aspect of the work that needs further investigation. Such investigations might help address such criticisms as Wierzbicki's that "multiplicities of musical material are perhaps not so apparent in the harmonically rich yet monosonic 1980 *Night Fantasies*."<sup>173</sup> This view, in consideration of the importance Carter places in musical drama, is misleading.

## DRAMA

Throughout much of music history, composers created drama within a single work via the successive presentation of multiple themes of contrasting character; this is the approach that yields contrasting primary and secondary themes in a sonata-allegro form. Schumann employs the technique across multiple movements in *Kreisleriana*, and Chopin to achieve dramatic effect in his four Ballades. What is revolutionary about Carter's mature music is that instead of presenting contrasting musical characters in succession, they often appear simultaneously. Carter creates drama or tension "out of simultaneous oppositions;" he has an insatiable "appetite for opposites. He is not interested in reconciling them..."<sup>174</sup> This is a fundamental aspect of Carter's mature style, the motivation of his drama, and is easily observed in chamber works such as the string

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<sup>171</sup> Link, "The Composition of Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*," 80.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 79.

<sup>174</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 13.



quartets. The genesis of Carter's life-long interest in simultaneous, contrasting musical events was his childhood meetings with Ives, who Schiff describes as "the most personal and pervasive" influence on Carter,<sup>175</sup> and Carter's mature style owes much to Ives' ideas concerning "opposition of forces."<sup>176</sup>

Rhythmic oppositions such as those found in *Night Fantasies* are one aspect of drama in Carter's music. "When a Carter pattern in a steady tempo is set against another that systematically speeds up or slows down, the listener not only observes the friction, but *feels* it."<sup>177</sup> Rosen makes a direct link between Carter's rhythmic ideas and drama, claiming that rhythmic frictions create the emotional quality of a composition. "The emotional character comes from the combination of different kinds of tempo, different kinds of time."<sup>178</sup> Oppositions can also be harmonic in nature. For example, the Piano Sonata, though not in Carter's mature style, is a struggle between two tonics, B major and B-flat major. Carter would later employ the same harmonic juxtaposition in the Cello Sonata.<sup>179</sup> Carter even transcends rhythm and notes in the creation of oppositions between instruments, for example, piano versus harpsichord in the Double Concerto, wherein Carter's writing emphasizes differences in the sonic qualities of instruments.

Though opposition is a key component of Carter's style, this does not preclude connections between parts or voices. Individual instruments or voices may sound unrelated, exhibiting totally different musical characters, yet in fact be connected on a deeper, not easily perceived level. "Diverse parts are 'heard as one totality' chiefly

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 18. Carter's relationship with Ives was complicated, nuanced. He was critical of certain aspects of the Concord Sonata, but in 1946 he undertook the challenge of sorting and organizing Ives' orchestral manuscripts. See: Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 43.

<sup>179</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 136.

because their obvious differences in character are balanced by a subtle consistency in their pitch content.”<sup>180</sup> This is true for pieces composed prior to 1959 and the completion of the String Quartet No. 2, after which Carter assigns different pitch sets “for each of its four component parts.”<sup>181</sup>

Jacobs’ comments on Carter are enlightening, showing how old paradigms do not necessarily apply to Carter:

His scores are ‘scenarios’ for the performers, and as a performer I want this exciting scenario to project. What makes it exciting? Well, when it works musically it’s going to be dramatically effective, it will have a theatrical quality to it that will move you by its gestures...<sup>182</sup>

The words that stand out in the above passage, “scenario” and “theatrical,” replace older terms such as “narrative” or “programmatic.” It is not that these things are extraneous to Carter’s music, but that the human element is restrained. Independent characters in the mature works are not “human figures,” but “energies.”<sup>183</sup> A fundamental problem for Carter’s piano music is that scholars tend to eschew considerations of drama or musical oppositions in these works, for instance, Wierzbicki’s use of the term “monosonic” to describe *Night Fantasies*. However, it is worth remembering that the piano is a polyphonic instrument, and though it would be impossible to achieve differentiation in timbre to the extent of the string quartets, there is no reason to approach Carter’s piano music any differently.

For example, Link has suggested that one possible interpretive approach to *Night Fantasies* would be to differentiate the two pulse streams by giving its stream its own

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<sup>180</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 45.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Paul Jacobs, interview by Michel Carton, Liner notes to *Paul Jacobs in Recital*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Arbiter 130, 2011, CD.

<sup>183</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 48-49.

unique musical character, and thereby increase the sense of musical drama. Foreground material surrounding the individual pulses of each stream would be characterized via its proximity to the underlying pulses. In addition, there is clear stratification of voices throughout much of the work. These may also be given their own, distinct, musical characters, much as one would in the performance of a Bach fugue. As Link has shown, individual strata (or voices) are easily identified by their respective divisions of the beat:



In the example given above, A, B, and C identify three distinct voices, each employing its own division of the beat. Voice A maintains a duple division of the beat and has an arching, legato character. Voice B shifts between triple and duple division, and also alternates between staccato and legato attack. Voice C is primarily staccato, and employs quintuplets in the last two beats of the bar. Moreover, the two quintuplets, marked X, surround a pulse of the slower stream of the polyrhythm (the exact pulse is identified by the accent mark), and could accordingly be characterized differently from the surrounding material.

Myriad possibilities for the creation of musical oppositions are presented in this example. Moreover, fourteen years following *Night Fantasies* Carter makes plain the capacity of the piano to act as chamber-group through his third work for solo piano, *90+*. In this instance, Carter writes a tolling-bell figure (prefigured by Ravel in *Le Gibet*)

whose recurring pulses maintain the same speed for the duration of the piece. In conclusion, there is little evidence to support a paradigmatic approach to Carter's solo piano works that is different from his chamber music.

#### DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

Discussion of themes and their development is not germane to Carter's music. Schiff describes how the "old distinction between theme and development is lost. There is never a privileged statement of thematic material in an ideal shape."<sup>184</sup> He continues, "almost all of Carter's music is epiphanic rather than thematic in its formal logic...continuous transformation of material replace[s] the theme-and-development polarity basic to the older symphonic style."<sup>185</sup> This is true in *Night Fantasies*. Attentive listeners will notice that certain textures and gestural shapes recur in the work. Yet each return is altered in some way, in the manner of an insomniac whose mind recalls past thoughts, which have been slightly altered through intervening time. It is "the effect of return without literal repetition... [there] are whole passages that seem to return although never literally – textures, sounds, and emotional characters throughout the work give the effect of return."<sup>186</sup> Carter later stated that during the composition of *Night Fantasies* he was particularly concerned with how one leads into a return: "Sometimes the new section or the return appears very abruptly in the *Night Fantasies*, but generally not; even when there is an abrupt change of texture and sound, usually it is made up of the same notes you have been hearing for the last three measures."<sup>187</sup> This shows the influence of

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<sup>184</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 37.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 38. Epiphanic: a sudden, seemingly accidental outburst of enlightenment and understanding. This conception of development was inspired by the writings of Joyce.

<sup>186</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 39.

<sup>187</sup> Carter, in Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 40.

Lowell's poetry via blurred boundaries between sections, and recalls Schiff's prototypical circular form, in which continuous motion is the goal.

## TEXTURES

Carter's scores have a unique texture. "The average willing and attentive listener, while likely not able to follow all of what transpires at any given moment, nevertheless gets the impression that what transpires is not at all a mere jumble...rather, is that of a multiplicity of discrete ideas that seem at least somehow sensible in their collective entirety."<sup>188</sup> Schiff calls it a "'multiple perspective,' in which various contrasting characters are presented simultaneously." In Carter's own words: "I do not want to write the kind of music that just marches on and marches off. I want it to seem like a crowd of people, or like waves on the sea—all things that signify a much more fluid and, to me, more human way of living."<sup>189</sup>

According to Schiff, the components of multiple perspective include: (1) Stratification of voices in clear, distinct layers. However, whereas "Bach's counterpoint merges separate voices into a unified chorale, Carter's counterpoint lets voices move individually, like people on a city street." (2) Mosaic texture which "combines atoms of sound that are similar and simple in a tight pattern." (3) Neutralization, wherein contrasts disappear and timbres blend. The focus shifts to tone color and dynamics.<sup>190</sup>

In *Night Fantasies*, polyrhythmic framework and foreground texture are intimately connected. "The interplay of real and illusionistic time generates the surface rhythms of each work and determines the nature of a work's structural rhythms and

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<sup>188</sup> Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter*, 64.

<sup>189</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 36.

<sup>190</sup> Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 55-60.

formal processes.”<sup>191</sup> The determination of the polyrhythm itself has profound effect on the foreground. As Link explains, the numerical pulse total of each of the two streams requires certain divisions of the beat in order to accurately express the polyrhythm.

## LEGACY

In a 1980 interview with David Dubal, Charles Rosen referred to Carter as “the greatest composer we have today.”<sup>192</sup> Rosen was a close colleague of Jacobs, and along with Jacobs, an early advocate for Carter’s music. He took the piano part in the premier of Carter’s *Double Concerto*, and frequently performed and lectured on the Piano Sonata. Rosen’s assessment of Carter’s standing suggests a degree of personal bias since he and Carter were long-time professional colleagues. Nonetheless, such high praise from the author of *The Classical Style* should not be casually dismissed.

In contrast to Rosen’s view is the vision of Carter portrayed in the second edition of Schiff’s monograph, that of an artist who late in his life felt increasingly isolated within American musical culture. Schiff even interprets Carter’s late work “In Sleep, in Thunder” to be a “story about the fate of the artist in America” through which Carter explores “feelings of isolation and anger.” In a similar way, though *Night Fantasies* is almost universally regarded as an important work in 20<sup>th</sup> century American music, it remains infrequently performed, and is in danger of being eclipsed by more recent, more readily accessible works.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>192</sup> Charles Rosen, interview with David Dubal, “For the Love of Music,” WNCN-FM Radio, New York, October 17, 1980, YouTube audio file, 51:52, Posted September 30, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSrexRPwnwk>. Rosen had just been offered the prestigious Charles Elliott Norton Chair of Poetry at Harvard. Rosen explains in the interview that he suspected the reason the honor fell to him was that Carter, who Rosen believed to be the committee’s first choice, had turned it down. As Rosen said, “[Carter] would rather write one piece than give six lectures.”

## CONCLUSION

Remarking on the difficulty of composing for the piano in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century, Carter noted to Rosen that composition was not only more difficult, but that “every time one wrote a piece it seemed as if one had to reinvent a language in which to write it.”<sup>193</sup> Given what is now known about the course of Carter’s career, this observation is unsurprising. One can imagine Carter uttering the statement above with a tone of frustration or exasperation in his voice.

It is impossible to guess on whether or not the piano will remain relevant as a medium for solo performance for future generations of composers. The quality, quantity, and variety of existing piano literature is undoubtedly intimidating. Regardless of the piano’s future prospects, however, there remains certain segments of the piano’s repertoire that have not yet been fully explored. Arguably, one such segment is American modernist works of the second half of the twentieth century. Paul Jacobs was a pioneering advocate for the music of this group of composers, and due in large part to his efforts some of their music has found its way into the canon of piano literature

Works such as *Night Fantasies* and those by Rzewski and Bolcom mentioned earlier, represent three distinct, though equally valid, stylistic projections for the twenty-first century. Carter is philosophically oriented, challenging, and intense. Rzewski represents something slightly more accessible, with a virtuoso element in the fore, and yet it is politically charged music. Bolcom is a composer who has sought to bring

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<sup>193</sup> Rosen, *The Musical Languages of Elliott Carter*, 1.

together popular and serious themes, and to this day continues his efforts to break down the barriers that have been erected between the two spheres. The three are dramatically different from a musical standpoint, but Jacobs did not limit himself to the promotion of one particular style. He was an advocate for music that moved him emotionally.

Investigating the details of Jacobs' biography brought to light certain personal qualities of the composers with whom he associated. Letters to Jacobs reveal Rzewski's insecurities concerning his skills as a composer. Bolcom seems to have been a source of strength and encouragement for Jacobs after he was diagnosed with HIV, and the Carters acted in an almost parental capacity in their support for Jacobs after his return from France, when he was not yet established in America and his financial circumstances were poor.

The examination of Jacobs' copies of *Night Fantasies* was an important moment in the progression of this study. The fact that the work is framed by an underlying polyrhythm is nothing new. David Schiff may have been the first to address it in his monograph on Carter, and it is the primary subject of John Link's doctoral dissertation. What is new is that Jacobs' scores propose answers to certain questions of interpretation, questions which Link begins to address in the final chapter of his dissertation. Specifically, what role, if any, should the polyrhythmic framework play in the final, live realization of the piece? Jacobs' scores show that an examination of the relationship between foreground features and the underlying polyrhythm was key to his interpretation of the work. Given Jacobs' authority as a close associate of Carter, we must conclude that future interpretations of *Night Fantasies* should take this into account.



In addition to considerations surrounding the polyrhythm, there are two additional points of emphasis concerning *Night Fantasies*. Firstly, *Night Fantasies* is a polyphonic work, and though the density of foreground material might tempt one to merely put down the damper pedal and overwhelm listeners with a wash of sound, it demands rigorous attention to the articulation of individual, contrapuntal voices. Often, these voices or strata may be distinguished not only by register, but also by rhythmic character and the division of the beat they employ. Voices belonging to, or associated with the faster pulse stream of the polyrhythm will display divisions of the beat that are factors of the faster stream's pulse total, 216. Voices from the slower pulse stream will be factors of 175.

Secondly, given what is known about the connection between the work and Robert Lowell's poem, "Myopia: A Night," it is imperative that performers show the distinct, larger sections within *Night Fantasies*, differentiating them by musical character to the greatest extent possible. Just like the narrator in Lowell's poem, whose field of vision, inner thoughts, and tone of voice change with each stanza, the pianist must emphasize the unique musical voice of the work's individual sections, of which there are many.

In summation, this study has attempted to accomplish two goals. It has sought to establish new paradigms for the interpretation of *Night Fantasies*, but also to pay homage to Jacobs, whose commissions now occupy a prominent place in the American piano repertoire, and whose career ought to be upheld as a model for modern pianists and for any who seek to cultivate the life of a patrician artist.

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