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Improvitory Presents Concerts of Experimental Music

Jonathan Glasier is trying to repair the damage to western music that Schoenberg inflicted on it. He's having a ball doing it, too.

by Rick Heller

According to Jonathan Glasier, western classical music took a bad turn with Schoenberg. What has resulted is one hundred years of misguided musical practice. Different than this misguided turn is the

have anywhere from 9 to 53 tones per octave.

Microtonal musician Ivor Darreg put out an album using a variety of microtonal sequences. Urging his listeners to abandon



Jonathan Glasier

microtonal music of Harry Parch and his musical descendants. Jonathan Glasier is one of the latter.

the 12 tone scale, he titled his album *Detwelvevulate*.

Sitting comfortably in his Sonic Arts Gallery on Beech Street in Golden Hill, Glasier is warm and friendly, a nice guy. Middle aged, with gray hair and a beard, Glasier notes: "Schoenberg introduced the 12 tone scale and in so doing started the avant garde. He held us back by using music without a harmonic basis."

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Glasier explained that Harry Parch lived with his family from the time he was three years old. Because of this early exposure he states, "Parch's music never seemed non-musical to me."

And because of this he is a natural candidate to carry on Parch's innovation. Glasier used to publish a journal about microtonal music called "Interval" and has been an active participant in microtonal music for years.

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Glasier explains that the reason Schoenberg settled on the 12 tone innovation was that he was a pianist and he adhered to the 12 tones that are found on the keyboard the black and white keys of a single octave. However, Glasier asserts that in between the discreet notes represented by the 12 keys on a piano are a whole spectrum of microtones. These microtones were used by Harry Parch and his followers to build new scales. But they were not used randomly.

The new scales developed were based on harmonic overtones. To illustrate this Glasier leaned forward and sang a note using throat singing, a technique from Asia that has gained some attention on the world beat scene. A buzzing vocalization emanates from his mouth. Then, by changing his technique another tone emerges from the first. Then changing his technique again another tone emerges. In this way Glasier is able to produce from a single note the harmonies that would be labeled the third, the fifth, the seventh, the ninth, and the eleventh.

He explains that these overtones exist with any tone you produce. It's part of the physics of sound. Because they are all derived from a single note they are termed monophonic (one sound). By taking the overtones, and the overtones of those overtones, what is termed the shadow harmonics, microtonal musicians build their scales. Parch's original scales had 28 or 29 tones to the octave. Other practitioners have built overtone scales that

He explains that presently there are two centers of interest in microtonal music. The west coast is mostly interested in building new instruments and the east coast is interested in using conventional instruments to play microtonal scales.

To illustrate the characteristics of a microtonal scale, Glasier plays a chord on a synthesizer keyboard. The chord has a mild dissonance, giving it a kind of bite. The chord he played is from a conventional western scale. He flicks a switch and plays the chord again. This time the sound is smoother, gentler, settling in easily. It is from a microtonal scale.

To promote the playing of microtonal music Glasier will feature a series of concerts at his Sonic Arts Gallery this fall. He calls it an Improvitory.

"It's the opposite of a conservatory which is to function as a place where old ideas are conserved. The Improvitory is a caldron for the music of the moment."

There will be a concert every two weeks and San Diego musicians Z.O. Voider, Marcelo Radulovich and Marcos Fernandez (all of whom has appeared in the pages of **ESPRESSO**) will play during the series. Zapalote from the Ruse will promote the concerts. For more information call Sonic Arts Gallery, (619) 231-3673.