

Thursady 25 June 1981
Jonathan Glasier 3932 Alameda Place San Diego CA 92103

Greetings-----

Couldn't sleep since about 3 A M--not sure what the matter is this time. Got the fans a started at 5. Another scrorcher in sight. Then the news says they want to have a Postal Strike next week. So I suppose I better get the important letters written.

I spent all too much time yesterday morning trying to write to Balzano about his article, inasmuch as Buzz Kimball brought me a copy of that Vol 4 # 4 issue which Schertz had given him and I guess it's over his head or something. Frankly, the Group Theory approach to selecting the Best Tuning Systems to Compose In is over my head too. I have now contacted three mathematicians who may help me understand what this is all about. It probably will take all Summer and well into September before they get around to discussing it with me, if then. But they did all make promises.

It's 20 years since I read popularizations of Group Theory. Something about Generalized Operators.

I can see that certain kinds of higher mathematics will be useful for dealing with music, and making better models of human hearing than we now have, but I don't think this one is it.

I would put more faith in symbolic logic and allied affairs.

Point No. 1 : I am extremely suspicious of ANYTHING that extrapolates from 12. Balzano's idea that "most of the instruments of the orchestra are constrained to 12-tone ..." just isn't true, and shows that he is ignorant of the hardware in the orchestra. Most of the instruments in the standard orthodox Establishment orchestra are violins, violas, cellos, and basses. To this add trombones. This means the majority of performers and their hardware are capable of ANY pitch within the compass of their instruments. The cont constraint he talks about is just as real as though it were physical, but this constraint is an indoctrination program of the Pianolatry Religion put there by the teachers and textbooks. The constraint to 12 is a mental Attitude installed in minds, not fretted onto fingerboards. Flutes and other wind instruments can deviate even if they have 12-tone-calculated keys on them. I have flute-type instruments here on which I can get all kinds of pitches that were not designed into the instrument.

Now if Balzano doesn't know the difference between mind and matter, between training/indoctrination/ritual/installed habit and the constraints built into instruments, how can I take anything he says very seriously?

Doesn't anybody review articles before publication? Check errors of fact? Polish up awkward statements? Nobody would ever let ME get away with things like that! They never have in 50 years. I don't want to humiliate him in public, so that's why I bring it up here. It's not his fault, probably. It could be innocent as the driven snow.

But however innocent Balzano may be, this kind of thing is still dangerously misleading. The new tribe of composers who enter music via computer exclusively, or via synthesizer and have never seen a violin and don't know how a cello works or a saxophone for that matter, will take his opening sentence as Gospel Truth and think that I am full of prunes.

- I would like to prevent a few disasters.

I have already experimented. I have already tried out new tunings on real people. Must be close to a thousand people in the last 30 years. I have gotten some feedback. I have one of the most complete collections of non-12 cassettes and tapes in existence.

So when I read an article which extrapolates from 12-tone theory, does so in dead complete silence, goes on for pages, and comes up with the notion that 20 is better than 19 and 30 is better than 29 or 31 and 42 is better than 41 or 43 when I have all kinds of evidence, my own and others', including Mandelbaum whom he cites at the end as one of the references, that 19 is better than 20 and 41 is better than 42 and 31 is better than 30, something just has to be the matter!

Yunik & Swift's article recommends 19 and shows practical trials, of course, and that takes some of the sting out of it. I played the "sound-sheet" synthesizer record in the magazine and it is almost "pop" or something that could have been quite at home buried in the middle of a rock album or at some broadcast concert of popular music or background for a movie. Buzz Kimball was unimpressed also. (He didn't even have the gumption to cut the record out and play it; Schertz & Pratt had not done so either.)

Now what does this tell us? The readers of a thing like Computer Music Journal care nothing about sounds, only about deaf and dumb computers. What else can I think?

While they make ink-marks on paper, I built real instruments and got other people to make sounds, and refretted for other people, and made and copied tapes and listened to other people's disks and tapes sent to me. What I have to say about the best systems--I mean of course the systems which newcomers should hear first and should play in first, rather than any authoritarian judgments--is based on experience, not theory. I have never been so presumptuous as to state rules in advance for composers to follow in the year 3500, nor have I condemned any system without a hearing.

For that matter, how could anybody know more about 12 than I do? 41 years of tuning it and 60 years of hearing it ought to be enough.

The danger here is not Balzano's article, which very few people who could help us will ever see or even fewer will study and nobody much will apply in practice. Our bitterest enemies won't use it on us, because they don't know how to and most of them will never read it.

The danger is the academic ignorance it reveals. Whether this article's statements about 12, 20, 30, and 42 are true or not is not quite the question.

The biggest danger is the insidious suggestion that a deaf computer can tell everybody in advance with the Voice of Perfect Authority that such-and-such tuning-systems are Recommended without anybody having heard compositions in those systems. This thing has MIT behind it now; when my letter was published in vol. 2 #2 of the same journal it wasn't the same journal because it didn't have all that academic snobbery to make every article seem the Royal Command and the Orthodox Religious Rule. I don't know enough about Theory of Groups to know whether the arguments are valid or not, and even if I did know about Theory of Groups, I don't know whether Balzano used them properly or improperly--it is impressive on paper, but what the hell has it to do with sounds?

Balzano put in the data -- did he put in the right facts? What did he ignore? What did he put into his theory that doesn't belong in the recommendation of tuning systems? I will know much more about this if I can discuss it with Corson and Hartzler and any other mathematicians I can get hold of. But by the time they get around to visiting me, it will be much too late. I will be too busy doing something else and this article has nothing to do with my success in 1981.

It is a telling example of over-abstraction. It is far far removed from sounds and from making up a new melody and from getting audiences to hear a new tune and evaluating their responses.

Yesterday I got los lots of mail: more scribbles from Chalmers about going in August to Mexico City, n and about trying to patent a just-intonation organ from Conviser, and his millionth of a cent realization of 12-tone temperament. Then a copy of ARTBEAT, a San Francisco art magazine which includes music among the arts, and the statement that it will go to a more expensive format in September and be distributed in Seattle and Los Angeles as well as San Francisco. They wrote me because I had published the X Bten and was listed in the directory or something of Dustbooks, I guess.

" I will ask them to do an article on the Megalyra or something.
When I can figure out what to say.

Conviser sent me a xerox of the clipping (over a year old) from L A Times about Jorgenson's Long Beach on-tour demo of the historical temperaments and his 7-and-5 temperament which he didn't understand so I had to explain--it is equal 7 offset from equal 5 in such a way as not to overstrain the piano strings and my 10- and 14-tone instruments are starting on the same note, viz. A. Oh welll, phooey.

I am exhausted from trying to get Buzz Kimball to do anything while he was here and he went back to Connecticut without meeting Secor or promoting Schertz and dup dumped the folders and three copies of Schertz's record here as if it were MY problem which it aint. He left 24 empty beer bottles and 4 full ones. At least he does empty his own ashtray, which is more than Krumholz did. He didn't want to sightsee in Hollywood or go to Griffith observatory or drive through Pasadena or anything. I guess it was the heat.

Glen has not been here. And I can't fix instruments that weren't brought here. And I am so tired. I got the Systems Esthetics chapter of the art book xeroxed for you. Maybe I better not try to adapt it if there may be a postal strike.

Yours