

Wenzdi 1 Jooly 1981

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Greetings---

As I use up 1960-63 carbon copies of letters to make carbons of current letters, I run across various items--and besides that, get the backside of the sheet into the current files so they will be saved another 5 years or such a matter, if I live that long.

Letters to Tillman Schafer and Ervin Wilson around 1962-- I suggested we get rid of MICROTONE by stealing a term from the photographers--maybe this was Ervin's idea--PANCHROMATIC.

At that time, panchromatic meant a better film--proper reproduction of red and orange, as compared with the ordinary film of the time. Of course all black and white is pan now. And then there is color.

Only objection is the meaning of PQ PANDIATONIC--which is the use at random of all seven notes of the diatonic scale and thus PANCHROMATIC might mean random clusters of the 12. We can probably check up on this.

No such objection brought up at that time, but maybe 20 years later it is something to consider.

New issue of Synex so I sent in my monthly comment.

I find the COMPUTER MUSIC JOURNAL very distant compared with such affairs as SYNEX. It was not that cold and distant at the time they published my letter three or four years ago. But at that time it was here on the West Coast and now it is under M.I.T.'s thumbs.

I wrote Larriau that two years ago somebody (Gary Morrison) took my 19-tone prelude over to a friend's house--they were both 18--and put it on a computer and sent me the cassette in a few days. That already happened. And here I read articles in Com Mus J1 which detail prohibitively expensive schemes for getting compositions heard. Expensive in terms of valuable TIME as well as mere Money.

If Gary Morrison's friend could afford to do my 19-tone prelude, then it does not have to cost that much in money and time. That is proof and I have the proof here.

These people want me to wait till after my death. They want to keep it so expensive that I can never have a single note played on a computer. I simply can't wait any longer.

Part of it is snobbery--my theory will cost more therefore it must be better than yours. My equipment is from Scandso Co. and therefore is better than yours. I have a math degree and you don't, therefore my compositions will have more FORM than yours. Or, My system costs exactly as much as an 1870 orchestra to put on a composition, therefore it must be at least just as good.

That's the Status thing agin. again.

Having a Steinway grand in the studio. Just having it-- never mind whether it's in tune or not. Never mind whether you ever play it or not. We might call it the Tuxedo Complex, since Partch didn't quite say that but he well COULD. In July 1941 I lived in Santa Monica and that fanatical Technocrat (not the 1981 meaning of this word which is quite harmless; the meaning it had 40 years ago when Technocracy Inc. was a body of zealots wanting a machanized totalitarian government by engineers--note carefully I did not say scientists!) used to torture me by coming over every few days and talking about a studio up in the mountains--Topanga Canyon probably--with a Steinway Grand--making nasty remarks against electronic instruments. He assumed that was what I coveted--what I really wanted--my Ultimate Goal as Composer. To have a name-brand piano.

Did you note in the Vol.5 # 1 COMPUTER MUSIC JOURNAL that you brought here, how much time one author wasted -- and how much money down the drain that must have meant! -- simulating piano tones? The Piano's Ghost haunts computer music as well as synthesizers and other ways of composing. The restrictions are taken as frozen untouchable unalterable commands from on high. And the Ghost is costing quite as much as the abovementioned Steinway or the sneaky Bösendorfer.

Have you ever read Thorstein Veblen's "Theory of Conspicuous Waste"--why people mow lawns and why they keep lap dogs in stuffy apartments? Well now, Veblen would be having bitter sarcastic chuckles over computer people wasting valuable time imitating that other Status Symbol, the Name-Brand Grand. Funny that I never thought of this before since I met you--we should have used it somehow as propaganda. Of course it would have to be updated--but the ridiculous spectacle of a computer and its programmers slaving for weeks to construct a simulation of one note from a piano string just has to be TOO MUCH.

* Almost as ridiculous as the spectacle of a symphony orchestra in a fairly-empty concert hall playing 75 instruments wielded with might and main into a microphone just so that the cutting needle on a disk can wiggle back and forth about four thousandths of an inch. You can't even see the wiggles on a magnetic tape but the idea is just as absurd, just as Dada, just as Exercise In Futility.

Thus like Don Quixote we have to fight Images, not hardware. Real pianos are deteriorating fast so we don't have to waste time on them--it's this Romantic Image Ideal Idol that is holding progress back.

That is, I shouldn't put the goals and images expressed in Computer Music Journal on my Treasure Map because they will not be within my reach. I already have some of what I need and I obviously need a different kind of people and things to come into my life--something that will get my compositions heard. Whether you should hitch your wagon to their star is another matter, but I somehow feel you will get farther by some other methods. Probably you will get access to microtonal-capability synthesizers far sooner than you can get through all the fancy expensive computer courses.

It's taking me so long to merely maintain what I have.

Yours