

Friday 21 August 1981

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Greetings *****

The beginning of the end, perhaps: As I was going shopping yesterday afternoon I heard the siren and when I got halfway up the street from here the paramedic ambulance was there with someone in a chair out on the sidewalk about four houses east of here--and it turned out to be Mes. Wilson. Apparently she had overexerted herself in the heat--it was over 90 here at the time. I don't know whether she had heat prostration or a stroke or simply had fallen and tripped. No further news after I got back home late afternoon either.

I may find out sometime today. I wouldn't think it wise for here to be alone after that--so this could mean someone else in control of this property sooner or later. On the other hand, it might be just a false alarm. I will know more by tomorrow I would think. The hot spell was such that I was dizzy and wobbly myself just before getting back to Hollywood Blvd. to wait for the bus back to Glendale about 3:30 yesterday afternoon.

The wait for the next issue of LIFE continues: any day now. And as I said before, back issues of OMNI are showing up finally in the secondhand stores, so if I need any for further publicity I can get them to the possible-interested-parties if there are to be any such.

Meanwhile: another document from Harry Conviser of west L A who is drafting a patent specification for his special electronic organ and who holds strange ideas about just intonation, and didn't quite understand why I was "rejecting the Great Classical composers" and this time I think he got some of the idea -- that I had had too much of it when I was 14-17 studying the cello and attending the Portland Junior Symphony rehearsals and one of the cellists way in back of that section a sawing away on the Old Warhorses under direction of the frenetic Russian conductor. I think he understands better now.

But all through the patent document there is this stuff about KEY-SIGNATURES and in Balzano's thing in COMPUTER MUSIC JOURNAL is a lot of stuff about KEY-SIGNATURES--indeed, a cardinal part of his mathematical theory, and in some other documents by various acousticians and inventors of musical instruments and in the repertoire of patterns to dxis display on the CRT monitor used in one of the Music Programs for arrangers available on Apple and other minicomputers -- the one shown the audience over in Pasadena when Chris Banta took me there for that program---it displays the key-signatures on a colorful staff and you decide what signature your song is to be done in, and that goes to the head of the staff.

Everybody is back in the 19th century thinking that key-signatures are more important than any sounds, and more important than any instruments or timbres or rhythms. 19th, not before that, because in earlier centuries it had not become standardized--especially the relative minor key-signature had not been standardized in relation to that of its relative major.

I'm really puzzled about Bolzano in the Computer Music Journal putting or building-in key-signatures into his mathematical theory because all the academics in all the conservatories and universities and colleges of today are atonal 12-tone serialists practicing that Religion religiously and scrupulously. Kind of strange.

Yasser's THEORY OF EVOLVING TONALITY, recently reissued I think it was by Dover paperbacks, was even inconsistent about key-signatures: after developing his theory, in which the fundamental basic consonant chord was to be the Hexad 8:9:10:11:13:14 -- i.e. with NO fifths in it --and the fifth not to be considered a consonance in 19-tone temperament and ruled out of the harmonic scheme (how did he then get to the 9 without a 3 x 3 to reach it??) --after abolishing all fifths and fourths, he then prints an elaborate table of key-signatures going up to 12 supra-sharps and 12 supra-flats in his key-signatures, with said accidentals being arranged in the conventional array of fourths and fifths F C G D A E B X V Y W Z ! I.e., you climb up to the new ivory tower of Evolved Tonality and then throw the ladder away!

You use two Fifths to get to the Ninth Harmonic and then deny that there was such a thing as a Fifth to get to the Ninth with!

We could excuse Yasser for all the above---after all, he was trained in some Russian conservatory or at least exposed to the strict indoctrination of the traditionalists of preRevolutionary Russia, and so he merely extrapolated from the things he was taught; so likewise with Joseph Schillinger who also was a Russian Refugee and trained in the same mould.

But now in the 20's? To cling to signatures? And then call it innovation and progress? After 70 or more years of atonality and a full century of hyperchromaticism with itty-bitty-thorny-pickety accidentals cancelling out all the signs in the key-signatures?

Around 1950 I stopped using signatures because it was getting obvious that when one must have special signs for quartertones and other things like special signs for commas in just intonation (of course I wasn't aware in 1950 that I would go in for 17 19 22 31 34 etc., for which the case against key-signatures is even stronger) *** it became painfully obvious even in 1950 that it was confusing to put 4 or 5 sharps or flats for a signature and then have to use naturals and other signs to cancel them in almost every measure. (See Pavel's Scherzade or Wagner's orchestra-parts or almost anybody's concerto written between 1880 and 1920) Inefficient and MISLEADING and guaranteeing mistakes in performance and even in copying--let alone transposing for Clarinets in B-flat and Horns in F and Saxophones in E-flat and all the rest of that unholy nonsense.

By throwing out key-signatures I was NOT throwing the key-system away. Simply, that if you go to a system like 19 or 31 in which there are more keys, and more kinds of keys, i.e. more modes than just major and minor--in 31 there are neutral keys and subminor keys and heaven only knows what other possibilities---and then you have subminor sevenths which create clouds of sesquiflats and semit flats and semisharps etc. so you are going to have accidentals before notes BELONGING to those keys whether just major and minor or the new modes now possible, a key-signature cannot contain BOTH a sharp and a semisharp of the SAME staff-degree! In 31 you can go to F-triple-sharp or E-triple-flat with the possibility of even quadruple sharps as accidentals and so

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But now in the 80's? To cling to signatures? And then call it innovation and progress? After 70 or more years of atonality and a full century of hyperchromaticism with itty-bitty-thorny-pickety accidentals cancelling out all the signs in the key-signatures?

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