Ξενα ρμονία Α΄ •

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(The new term we are trying out here is formed on the analogy of *Philharmonic,* using the Greek word ξένος, *xénos,* 'strange', 'foreign'.) The musical status quo that has endured several hundred years is now being challenged. New instruments permit scales and tunings not practicable on the piano. These will seem strange at first. One needs a term sufficiently general and inclusive, which does not beg the question, imply too much, nor commit anyone in advance.

Recent publications show a decided change in attitude toward musical trends. In particular, electronic music has burst into prominence; it's fashionable; it's 'in'. You may have read our 1963 *Special Bulletin.* 1963 wasn't quite time for it, though there were many scattered stirrings of interest. 1965 showed more signs of the turning-point being at hand.

Also, the defensive ramparts round the 12-tone equally-tempered scale have finally begun to crumble. For instance, the compositions and instruments of Harry Partch, conceived in an *unequally*-spaced untempered scale, are finally getting deserved attention after many years of fanatical, irrational prejudice against them. The meantone temperament with its excellent major thirds is being revived; and the almost identical 31-tone equal temperament proposed in the seventeenth century by the Netherlands physicist, Christiaan Huygens, is attracting the attention of a number of today's composers.

Other scales, such as those with 17, 19, 22, 24, 34, 41, 53, and other numbers of tones to the octave, also are being explored. The obstacle, in our opinion, has been largely *economic:* no one wanted to make an extensive financial investment in any one unorthodox tuning system. This difficulty is now being swept away: electronic instruments can be made more *adjustable;* the present writer built an electronic organ with many possible tunings, retunable in less than an hour.

Are you afraid of oddball musical notations? Automatic instruments will surmount that difficulty; computers can now produce a wide variety of musical sounds; tape recording permits the performer or composer on such instruments as the violin or cello to record permanently any system of pitches without having to worry about how they would have to be written.

Recent advances in techniques for using computers and similar machines now make it possible to compose at a typewriter keyboard with ordinary numerals and letters of the alphabet. Methods of doing this are still being evolved, but a workable system is very close.

That is, people are finally seeing the light—rather than patch up or adapt or twist the established instruments, procedures, and traditions of the piano and symphony orchestra of the Romantic Period, why not start from scratch with the wonderful facilities now at hand, and produce truly *new,* Twentieth-Century instruments?

This, indeed, is the burden of our recent (1965) publication, *Shall We Improve the Piano?* which has attracted so much favorable attention that at the moment of writing this, copies are all gone! We have to reprint. Mr. Tangerman's editorial, "Horizons —The Sound of Music—Modernized" in *Product Engineering* for November 8, 1965, dealt with this monograph and resulted in orders from all over the country and Canada, still coming in as of March 1966. Inquiries also resulted from John Wilcock's brief mention of it in the New York *Village Voice*.

Actually, it would have been a tragedy if the piano could have been so "improved". So transformed, it no longer would have been faithful to the ideas and ideals of Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, et al.

Thas has already happened before, remember. When Liszt, Bülow, and other 19th-century luminaries took Bach's compositions for clavichord, harpsichord, and Baroque pipe-organ and restructured them to fit the piano, it took two or three generations before anyone realized what a serious impropriety had been committed against Bach and his colleagues. Now, of course, the harpsichord has resumed life and growth, while clavichords, lutes, viols, and other instruments rejected by the Romantics are on their way back in.

In our letter published in TIME magazine p. 18, issue of October 8, 1965, we pointed out that concert-halls are for music of another century, not *this* one—'live' music perhaps, but for *DEAD* composers exclusively. Someone must now agree with us, because the letter got published.

New, late-20th-century compositions should be composed on new instruments or even *without* instruments!—and can be recorded for playing in the listener's own home when he/she is in the mood to listen, and difficult passages or puzzling figurations can be repeated till they are understood. Thus the concert-hall, the piano, the orchestra, are by-passed entirely; more importantly, they will not be disturbed or changed by any influences of avant-garde music, so that concerts of 19th-century music will remain authentic and traditional in every way.

The neglected, out-of-order, out-of-tune condition of most pianos in most homes and even studios and halls is a worldwide public disgrace. This is a socio-economic phenomenon—it simply costs too much for the average family or firm to keep up a piano at the present time, and furthermore, contemporary homes and apartments seldom have room for a piano anymore. So it seems advisable to junk all the old wheezy thumpboxes and preserve only the best pianos in our concert-halls, recording studios, and conservatories.

Too late to publish in our Piano Booklet, portable compact transistorized electronic organs have begun to appear on the market—here is an instrument small enough for the modern living-room, or even the trailer. This is not the end of the story—only the beginning. Unlike the piano, these miniature organs will not remain static for a century; they will evolve and improve just as automobiles and TV sets are doing.

In a few years, this will mean that the general public can share in musical progress. Meanwhile, it will be a very profitable enterprise for all concerned. The stodgy, stuffy stagnation is over.

We shouldn't ignore the 'do-it-yourself' movement either. Very few people have ever tried to build their own pianos; and when they insisted on doing so, the result was usually a tragic failure. Even the tuning and adjustment of pianos are much more difficult than comparable work on other instruments—take the word of one who has done this for

years. But the case for the harpsichord or electronic organ is very different: kits for both are readily available. No longer do you have to limit yourself by meekly accepting a standardized, frozen-design factory product on an "or else" basis.

Even if you aren't a do-it-yourselfer yourself, you will know someone who is, probably eager and willing to undertake such a project for you at a reasonable figure.

The hi-fi craze has good points as well as bad: some of the owners of sound equipment are no longer content with the role of purely-passive armchair listener. They are altering the sounds from what was on the record, or in some cases manipulating or 'doctoring' tapes. Sometimes a growing acquaintance with recorded music prompts them to take up an instrument. Now that faithful, mirror-like reproduction of music has become so commonplace, at least a few people are seeking something more creative than the mere pursuit of slavish copycat perfection.

To the "xenharmonist", this universal ubiquity of hi-fi offers many opportunities: listeners do not have to own expensive, experimental, rare, newly-invented instruments in order to hear the new timbres, scales, and tuning-systems they can produce. The horizons are no longer hemmed in by what can be mass-produced commercially, nor by one's fingering-technique.

Recordings are commercially available of computer music and music prepared on similar machines. Some of the early releases included Columbia ML 5966 (stereo MS 6566 from the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Studio in New York City, and Epic LC 3759 (stereo BC 1118) electronic compositions produced by Netherlands composers at the famous Philips Laboratories in Eindhoven, Holland. Noises as well as tones are being explored, and the fabulous borderland between music and speech is being investigated.

No longer are these sounds pipe-dreams relegated to the distant future. They are here now. This is the triumphant culmination of decades of pioneering inventions--the first workable electrical organ was introduced in 1898—*The Telharmonium*; and one of the earliest inventions of Lee de Forest, father of the vacuum-tube amplifier-oscillator, was an electronic solo musical instrument, vintage World War I! The normal period of time between the primitive conception of an invention and its debut in public life has elapsed; the hour has struck for electronic music as well as microtones.

For articles appearing around 1965 and dealing with electronic music, one may look up *Radio-Electronics* for June 1965 (cover-feature), and *Vogue* for February 1, 1966, p. 176 'The New Music', by Joan Peyser. For an explanation of the way microtonal music relates to atonality and what has gone before, see March 1, 1966 *Vogue*, 'How Music Is Built', by Peggy Glanville-Hicks, p. 200 ff.

Among those collaborating with the present writer so far have been: John H. Chalmers, Jr., Ervin M. Wilson, M. Joel Mandelbaum, and Tillman Schafer.

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