

## Erin Main's Live Music Report

*WC for musicology session: 790*

### 4/8 musicology session

On April 8<sup>th</sup> I attended three talks about modern composers. The first was a study of motifs in Sciarrino's String Quartet No. 8, presented by Antares Boyle, a student at the University of British Columbia. The second was entitled "How and Why Cage Misreads Webern", by Jeffrey Perry from Louisiana State University. The final talk was about a structural analysis of Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child*, by Christopher Gaaney, another student from the University of British Columbia. Overall, I felt like all three talks were interesting, but only the first two were really tractable within their given timeframe.

The full title of the first talk was "'Conoscere e riconoscere': Fragmentation, Repetition, and Formal Process in Sciarrino's Instrumental Music". Boyles first presented us with an excerpt from Sciarrino's String Quartet No. 8. In the excerpt, I noted first the indeterminate quality of each line, as they would tail off indistinctly. The piece then became marked by emphatic entrances over a smoother texture. At the end of the excerpt, the contrary motion of the lines became apparent. Throughout, it was pretty apparent that there was some idea of motific structure. Boyles's "thesis statement" for the talk was that Sciarrino develops motifs (or fragments as she called them) through repetition, focusing on "economy of detail". She then presented four different "case studies" encapsulating this idea. The most interesting idea that stuck out to me was the time scales at which the case studies operated. Sciarrino seemed to want listeners to focus on the moment-to-moment changes between motifs -- the local scale of listening; Sciarrino was quoted as saying, "To hear more we must enter into the shadow of the sound." However, there was also a sense of large scale in some of the excerpts, of the piece eventually moving to a different section based on the musical qualities (timbre for instance) of the motifs. I found this contrast interesting, as to hear the small scale details vs. the large scale structure required a shift in what I was concentrating on; it reminded me that the perception and enjoyment of music is a truly subjective experience. Overall I thought this talk was constructed well, brought up interesting points, and backed up claims with great examples.

The second talk was about Cage's "misreading" of Webern. Personally, I did not like the attitude of the speaker towards musical interpretation. The premise underlying the talk was that there is a *right* and a *wrong* way to understand a piece of music, which I believe is a usually false statement. It is hard to know what a certain person was seeing/hearing in a piece, and to discount it because it does not line up

with your own personal interpretation seems intellectually unsatisfying. Moving past my own beliefs on the subject, I thought that the ties that Cage made between the structures of Satie and Weburn were indeed hard to see. From my own practice of Satie's piano music and the musical excerpts we've heard of Weburn in class, I hear very little overt similarity in the structures and qualities of their music. The presenter, noting Cage's penchant to only look at numbers associated with music, attempted to identify the "micro-macro structure" that Cage saw by doing a quasi-palindrome, or seeing the music as Cage did. This consisted of doing some algebraic tricks to attempt to line up phrase lengths with connections that Cage made. What I took away from the material presented was that Cage had an interesting way of doing math to justify his hearing of rhythms and structures in Weburn and Satie. The presenter did note that in the end, Cage and Weburn had some similarities in their use of silence.

The third talk was about Claude Vivier's *Lonely Child*. Claude Vivier is a spectral composer who employed quarter tones, extended techniques, and unusual harmonies to create the ethereal-sounding *Lonely Child*. To be honest, I did not understand much of what the speaker was saying about the analysis. It seemed like he identified some "timbre-harmonies" and analyzed what pitches they were comprised of. He then attempted to develop a theory of interval classes based on what he perceived. At the end of the process, he identified several ways of understanding the significance of the different "timbre-harmonies" based on whether or not the listener was paying attention to the foreground ("atomic listening") or the background ("holistic listening"). Overall, the concepts he presented were interesting and I wish he had a little more time to explain his analysis techniques and ideas.

I enjoyed attending the session and felt like it was a great learning experience to see what music students/faculty were studying and accomplishing. My favorite talk was definitely the first one because it was very concrete and tractable.

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