

Garrett List

Telephone ringing.

KITCHEN! No, we are closed today....

I was talking about composing yesterday. And the problem with definition's that we have is like JOHN CAGE is a great artist, and STEVIE WONDER is nowhere. And that just doesn't make sense, because STEVIE WONDER happens to be a great song writer. And most of the problems of those definitions come in through economic categorizations.

The idea of the song is the song is one of the only real collective forms that we have in the west. It is the only collective form we have in the west, the song form. I don't know how it exists in Europe especially. I think it's true there, because it's a European form actually. But by the time it got to America with the African influence and the Latin American influence and the Eastern influence, the Oriental influence, that kind of grew to new proportions and it became like what we call jazz or you know this popular music and stuff.

And the forms are going more complex even now you know, like after CHARLIE PARKER and everything like that. And the bee-bop. It expanded the thing tonally. And since then they've been expanding since the free jazz of the sixties. The forms have been even more expanded. And so they began getting quite complex. Like song form can be a quite complex thing. You take like an arranger, somebody like BILLY STRAYHORNE, and some of his arrangements get quite complicated. He was a companion of DUKE ELLINGTON'S. And DUKE ELLINGTON'S arrangement became almost compositions. They're ALMOST getting to be complex compositions. They're beautiful, you know.

So did you actually learn for your pieces now from this kind of arranging?

Well, no. Mine tend not to be like arrangements. Mine tend to be like coming more out of the avant-garde. Because I think that the avant-garde of the fifties and the sixties was one of the things that they were really working on, was reorganization of the human beings in the art, who were creating the art. Well like JOHN CAGE, EARLE BROWN, MORTON FELDMAN, CHRISTIAN WOLFF. The things that they did. They didn't like jazz. They were afraid of pop music, I think. They were afraid of folk music, the forms, because of the big economic conflicts that go on all the time in our culture. So they're always like staying away from it.

Actually CAGE ah in one interview said that he doesn't like jazz, the continuity. It gives him a feeling of having to do something.

Well, he doesn't like the rhythm. Well, you see he may even be changing on that score lately. But that's true. He says also that improvisation like jazz is like having a conversation. And if you want to have a conversation, sit down and have it. But on the other hand, I think like if you're interested in unifying and interested in trying to find some kind of unity that's becoming an anarchic unity if you will, like a syndicalist kind of thing.

You said that the avant-garde composers were afraid to make a generally acceptable music.

Why?

The problem of making a generalist music, making a music that is a general music in this culture what happens is that it SELLS, you know, like you sell it. And you try to make a lot of money off of it. See? But a generalist music, because it's popular, it's not necessarily a bad thing. Like there have been really great examples of a generalist music that was really true music, and high music.

You start all the way back like COLE PORTER, you know. Or GEORGE GERSHWIN. I think that some of his songs were incredible, incredible song writer. And some of his more complex forms were really beginning to be on the verge of being their own kind of music, which in the time that he was doing it was really unusual, was really a more difficult task you know. Because the separation was even greater in those times, in the twenties, although they tried to get it changed in the thirties.

The thing is you can hardly tell if he was a great composer, because he got messed up by the music industry.

Yeah, exactly. So and he started out that way. And the same thing happened....Well, he had died very young, too. He died like before he was forty. And the same thing happened to CHARLIE PARKER, the same thing happened to JOHN COLTRANE. The same thing happened to CLIFFORD BROWN, the greatest trumpet player that ever lived. He was dead before he was thirty. You know, the two guys who created BEE BOP, JIMMY BLANTON and CHARLIE CHRISTIAN, the great bass and guitar player, who played with BENNY GOODMAN and stuff like that. They were dead before they were twenty-two.

And they were dead because the way of life that they had to lead to do that kind of music was so hard that way.... I mean, CHARLIE CHRISTIAN died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-two. You see? He came from a poor family. He didn't have any health in his life. There was no real health in his life. And so he came to New York. And he got hooked up with drugs and booze and women and you know, I don't know, whatever, the kind of money life. And he was out, you know, he went.

Well, it's hard, because in this culture it's always associated with big money. It's always associated with lots of money. And I think that art in general is like diversion, not for the artist themselves, because it's a way of life, but for the people who take in the art, whether it's JACKIE KENNEDY ONASSIS looking at ANDY WARHOL's soup cans or it's somebody in a bar listening to STEVIE WONDER'S tunes or if it's PEGGY GUGGENHEIM listening to JOHN CAGE or if it's somebody listening to BILL EVANS playing piano. It's all diversion to these people.

Is the audience at the KITCHEN looking for diversion?

It's an artists' place. It's mostly artists that come here, artists and some general public. You have to remember New York is probably the largest colony of artists in the world, on the island of Manhattan. And the way I feel about it is, the most people who come here are interested in art or in music in some kind of specialist way, who are themselves specialists. There is a great deal of general

public that does come here, what I tend to call G.P., general public, like somebody who just wants to hear it, you know come here. Like if you have a concert that somebody who's well-known, you get like those kind of people. But on the whole it's other artists and people who are interested in the art somehow. Now, that does include all kinds of people. It includes the Peggy Guggenheimers on one hand, and it includes other people. So, you know, I think that it's really an artists' place, if you will. It's a place about specialists. And the only way it could be anything other than that would be if we had more space.

Because how you find out about a concert at the KITCHEN is by knowing about the KITCHEN. You know, we don't take out huge ads in the New York Times or anything like that so everybody can find out about it. We just have little ads. And the people who know about the KITCHEN will look for them. And the artist himself brings in his own kind of following. And it's a way of showcasing in a sense the work, so that the word gets out that it's happening and so on and so forth.

So if someone like RZEWSKI performs, and he suggests like doing political music, will his approach function here?

I think that artists are in need of education and enlightenment as much as anybody else is. And that a place like the KITCHEN exists, it's importance is probably for that, for the community of artists, at this point. It could at some point become a larger place and become more of a place for regular people. But at this point it's really in service of the artist community. And in this city that's a very necessary thing I think.

But do apolitical intellectuals get RZEWSKI'S point?

But I think that if they hear a song like that, like one of FREDERIC'S, then it's gonna effect them somehow. I mean, they'll have to think about it. They'll have to think about their relationship to the world in that sense. And I think that's good. It certainly isn't a song for the masses, that song. It's the same thing with CORNELIUS. Do you know CORNELIUS?

CORNELIUS CARDEW, ya ya.

Well, he's also interested in this problem. He gave a concert here. And he gave it for other specialists, other artists here. And it was quite a nice concert I thought. I enjoyed it. And the people he'd been playing to all through this country when he was on tour here were college students who are you know middle class. That's the way he can do it, because he's what he is. He's like an intellectual musician type, right? And the kinds of places he can get a chance to play are in those kinds of situations. And so when you're in that kind of situation, you have to know that and then try to deal with your ideas on that level. And he did that, and I think he was fairly successful. I'm SURE he got people thinking about what he was doing.

But the students here are not at all ready for revolution. The United States in general is so far away from realizing concepts of communism. It's like the sun on the horizon you can never reach.

But you see now, the same thing was true with

China in 1925, that it was so far away there was the sun on the horizon, and you'll never reach it. Right? And they had to search out their own models. They had to search out their own way of doing things. And it was just a long, hard struggle to gain it. And I think that in America, while in a certain way we're very very far away from it, from a revolutionary process, of a way of life. But, on the other hand, there's a certain strain. I mean, I'm speaking as an American. I'm almost pure American, if there is such a thing.

And I think that there's something very strong in the people. There's also a very great tendency towards communalism in this country, towards communalism and also towards anarchy, which is something that isn't really accepted by a lot of Communists, the idea of anarchy. But anarchy is another mode of organizing people.

The thing is that the whole bourgeois revolution, the whole thing that happened in 1776 was part of a very large pan-European bourgeois revolution that was felt not only in France and America. But it was felt all over Europe and the world. And so we grew from that. That's where our beginning was, in the bourgeois revolution. So we have a lot further to go. It's not like in China or in Russia where the bourgeois revolution just barely touched Russia in a sense. And it was still a futile state in a way by the time the Communist Revolution came. So we grew from the second stage.

But America is such a diverse society with people coming from all over the world living here, from Africa, from Puerto Rico and so on, in contrast to China. And so you are confronted with completely different problems.

Well, that's why I think music is very important at this time. Music has always been very important in this country. And if you want to get people to do something in this country, and if you can win them over with music, (laughing) you can get them to do almost anything. You know. And also, just the way things develop. Some of the most profound social ideas that have happened in this country have come from music.

And so I started writing a lot of songs. And also like the way, I think the most important way that it comes in is is not, it's even less than FREDERIC'S music.... In FREDERIC'S music and in CHRISTIAN'S music text is very important.... Because that's the way the political ideas, the concrete ideas get put across, you know. And that's a very important part of political music.

In mine I think it's the organization of the music I think that's the most important thing. The way that the musicians relate to one another and the metaphor in a sense of what that means in terms of another way of looking at the possibilities of people working together. Because I find that certain things, for instance rhythm, is one thing that practically everyone can agree upon. I mean, even JOHN CAGE taps his toes to you know. He probably doesn't want to admit it probably, but he does.

In some of CAGE'S music of the forties was a very cooking kind of stuff, you know. And rhythm is one of the few things that everybody can agree upon, right? And rhythm is very important for my music also. And the thing about rhythm really allows for each person to do his own

thing so to speak, more or less and still be able to be unified with other people.

How does it work now in one of your pieces? The tea water is cooking. I'll put it off.

I'll get some cups. Have you got a match by any chance?

No.

GARRET GETS SCORES FROM HIS BRIEFCASE.

How long has it to brew, the mate tea?

About four minutes.

How do you realize this playing together then?

Well, the piece is called THREE PROCESSES. And it's three different ways of playing music together. Anyway, so, this is the first thing. This is an improvisation using basic techniques, about six basic techniques. All these notes line up here in terms of this thirteenth chord, this series of thirteenth chords. And it's broken down into a melodic process, right? And so you could read this thing, and it's in a nine beat cycle. So it's.....

(intonates the structure)

So you can read it like this all the way down. Or you could switch lines. You could play this line and go to this line and then that line. Or you could go from this note to that note to that note to that note if you could do it. So, as long as you play the note in the right place in terms of the time. So that's how you can treat it melodically.

And then you can also not play. You can leave things out. You can change the accents around. You could play this as a three, or you can go, or.....

(intonates the structure)

Or you can sustain notes. You could just play parts of the line. YOU could go....(intonates again)

Or you could do that by jumping back and forth over the lines also. Everybody makes up the music by doing all those things. So anyway, this goes on. And there's nine transpositions of this, nine sets. And so the music develops through the initiation of the players.

So there's no conductor necessary. So that's like an easy recipe for writing music where no Conductor is necessary.

Well, I'm gonna do a piano concerto actually now, I hope. Like the piano is the architect of western harmony. It controlled western music for a long time, and I'd like to bring that out....Actually, how did you get interested in doing these conversations?

I visited some concerts last year of people that came to Europe, and to Cologne, from America. And I was often astonished about the open-mindedness that people had. And so I just decided one day to just travel around the States and make recordings to get clearer about this. So far I've noticed a kind of social pressure which challenges the people to open up new cultural space. And that's kind of like being in the desert.

trying to find the oasis.....

Yes, trying to find the oasis. And even try to survive without one. And that gives you more strength in your work.

I got a vague feeling though from being in Europe that the American colonialism of art in Europe is changing, and that the Europeans are beginning now to reconfirm some of their own situations. And that Europe will be making its own music in a certain way.

You dig it out from the ground that you're in. I think that's very important. So it's all about locale. What I've found happening is that the more universal, the more global village type of idea became a possibility, the more it was important to deal with the place you were in, the actuality of the ground that you're standing on.

Do you know JOHN McOUIRE? He lives in Cologne some time now, an American. And we have some nice talks. He once quoted WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS. He said, "Bad art is national. Good art is international. And ART is local."

I agree with that. Like WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS is really a New Jersey man. I just agree, you know. And I was hoping that, and I'd been feeling signs that that was happening in Europe, that there's this need.

But you see too, I was talking to another guy named HENRY FLINT, who is like a conceptual artist and is now doing kind of a hillbilly music. He calls it avant-garde country music, but. It sounds funny, but you can't take on a music and wear it like a shirt, you know? Like HENRY says, you have to have a birthright to it. You have to be born into it. And you can't wear a cultural thing like a shirt. It has to be grown from you. It has to be like the hair on your skin rather than the shirt on your back in a sense. And the problem is maintaining those kinds of things and somehow finding your relationship to your group, and actually finding out what your group is, so that you can deal with it.

And like the notation is very important in these things. Like say here, a "song", like that. Instead of "changes" here. We call them "changes" here you know. In America anyway there's a whole style that comes out of reading music like this. It's almost classical in this country by now, the way of dealing with that. And what this notation means and how it relates to each person that takes it up like reading changes. The composer writes the melody and the changes, but how it's realized is very much up to the person who's playing it. And like I say, the song form, is probably the only real collective form there is.

The only problem then is, when I think about that, if this music wouldn't be too hermetic, too closed up, OR if it could have the ability to show within the familiar of what I choose, where I am from the "common understanding". So, we have two groups of interest, people that speak about "world music" and put different styles together, on which level ever. Or, other people, they just stay where they are, if it's in Soho, or if it's like in Laramie. On this ground they.... they show ah the common in the familiar, if that's possible. If we talk about world music, you have to

understand the relationships, these imperialist-colonialist kinds of things. Because it can't be a lifting of a music. RICHARD TEITELBAUM's thing was one of the healthiest examples of it, where the musicians actually got together and played together, you know. And that's a nice way of going about it I think. But I know some people who go some place to hear music they like, you know, and then come back and write the music in the same style and copy it and stuff like that.

And the only way it can really be..... and that's something the third world understands very well..... is the only way for a one-world kind of feeling is where each nationality, each locality, has its own strength. So that people don't have a need to take from another place, but can have what they need where they are. Then exchange really does become possible, right? You can't exchange things without each place having its own strength.