206

Seattle
Webern Festival

The New Dimensions of Music

By Ernst Krenek

[Editor's summary=]

Of Mr. Krenek's second lecture only a summary can be offered because frequent reference to musical examples and extended demonstrations at the blackboard make a verbatim transcript impracticable.

It was pointed out that recent music, insofar as its composers looked to Webern as their source of inspiration or point of reference, developed in two seemingly contradictory directions: On the one hand, toward complete determination of all aspects (parameters) of the musical process through serial organization; and, on the other hand, toward relinquishing any kind of organization and subordinating the musical process to chance.

The motivations prompting serial integration were examined. It was suggested that some composers (especially those who had adopted the twelve-tone technique around 1930) followed an experimental urge: to see what would happen if the basic principle of dodecaphony were extended over the whole musical process, while others (especially the younger ones) employed serial predetermination because it helped them in getting away from the concepts of thematic relationship, development, and coherent structure, which had still dominated twelve-tone music of the Schoenbergian type.

Serial organization of the dimension of time was said to be the most consequential step in the establishment of modern serialism. Since the philosophy of the movement demands a maximum of unity, all serial statements should be derived from one single source. It is logical that this source is the freely chosen twelve-tone row. The intervals between its consecutive tones furnish the numerical magnitudes to be used in determining measurements and proportions

207

regulating the various parameters, especially that of time.

Karlheinz Stockhausen's method of deriving time values from the vibration ratios of a tone-row was explained and illustrated by examples from his Zeitmasse. Mr. Krenek then discussed the principle of rotation (i.e., systematic and serially determined progressive switching of tones within the chosen row), which he had applied for the first time in his Lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetae (1940). This principle turned out to be of paramount ~~importance~~ significance in serial music because the continuous combination of constant (invariant) elements with systematically (serially) varying elements produces the desirable degree of unpredictability.

This was illustrated by a brief analysis of Mr. Krenek's Sestina (1957) and musical examples from this work. Here the time values are derived from the tone-row by referring to the numbers of half-tone steps emcompassed by the intervals of the row. The formula of rotation governing the poetic structure of the Sestina is consistently applied to the various forms of the tone-row as well as to the serial arrangements of time values, articulations, dynamics, speed levels, etc.

Mr. Krenek concluded his ~~remarks~~ address with remarks on the extreme cases of musical indeterminacy, as exemplified in the manifestations of John Cage and his associates.