

**Review: Richard Taruskin's *The Oxford History  
of Western Music*  
Part 2**

**Franklin Cox**

**Introduction**

One of the most disturbing aspects of Taruskin's narrative techniques in the *Oxford History of Western Music* is their close resemblance to propaganda. Posing as an objective, factually-based historian and buttressed by the *Oxford* armature, Taruskin has seduced many into believing in the tales he weaves, often implicitly praising the reader's boldness in overcoming the dead hand of "myths" spun by past and present rival historians.<sup>1</sup> But if one analyzes his tactics closely, it becomes clear how a steady parade of half-truths, shifting definitions, rhetorical shadings, artful camouflage of personal opinions in carefully selected citations, equivocations, and clearly deceptive presentations—all rendered in a vivid prose style—function to create a fairly convincing counter-reality. Its seeming veracity can only be punctured with the lance of detailed logical and empirical analysis.

Section A. of the second half of this extended review will explore in some depth Taruskin's "social/asocial"<sup>2</sup> dichotomy, which provides the ideological scaffolding for the last three volumes of his *History*. As Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky serves for Taruskin as the archetypal nineteenth-century "social" composer and the primary antipode to the "asocial/antisocial" Germans Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner, Taruskin's article, "Chaikovsky and the Human: A Centennial Essay" and his presentation of Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky's symphonic music in the *Oxford History* (Vol. III, pp. 789-801)<sup>3</sup> will be the central focus of this section. The five

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<sup>1</sup> Although Taruskin has performed a valuable service in puncturing specific music-historical myths, one gets the sense in reading the *Oxford History* that Taruskin believes that traditional musical history as a whole is so "infected" by the German influence that it is little better than an ethnocentric myth, to be replaced by his peculiar brand of "true history."

<sup>2</sup> Owing to the idiosyncratic meaning of all such terms in Taruskin's hands, the appropriate scare quotes will be employed.

<sup>3</sup> This article, which focuses on Tchaikovsky's success as a "social" composer in the aristocratic milieu of Tsarist Russia, comprises a chapter from Taruskin's earlier book, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 239-307. Another chapter from this book, "P. I. Chaikovsky and the Ghetto," pp. 48-60, as well as portions of "Chaikovsky and the Human" serve as the basis of Taruskin's discussion of Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin* in the *Oxford History*, Vol.3, pp. 632-639. Numerous passages from the latter chapter ("Chaikovsky and the Human") were carried over almost verbatim to the abbreviated *Oxford History* presentation; compare, for instance, pp. 291-299 and 304-306 in the earlier article to pp. 793-799 in Vol. 3, or pp. 253-254 and 256 in the earlier article to pp. 789-792 in Vol. 3.

case studies that follow, four focused on key historical figures in Taruskin's *History*, will demonstrate the unreliability of his historical methods. The first case study, Section B., centers on Taruskin's discussion in the *Oxford History* of Tchaikovsky's symphonic output. An accentuated version of Taruskin's "social/asocial" split appears in Vol. 5 (*Music in the Late Twentieth Century*) in his "dialectical" opposition of Benjamin Britten and Elliott Carter, the subjects of the two succeeding case studies, Sections C. and D. The fourth case study, Section E., will focus on Taruskin's presentation of Steve Reich's career and music. The fifth and final case study, Section F., will center on what Taruskin casts as a historical turning point in the 1970s, when he believes that Modernism and post-tonality revealed their exhaustion, clearing the path for tonality's triumphant return to dominance.<sup>4</sup>

## II. "Social"/"Asocial" Dichotomy and Case Studies

### A. "Social/Asocial" Dichotomy: Tchaikovsky

Because Taruskin treats Tchaikovsky as the archetypal "social" composer, his presentation of the composer in relationship to his social environment will serve as a model for Taruskin's conception of this term. I will attempt to clarify some of the criteria that Taruskin appears to employ in order to identify a composer as "social," and then unravel the terminological, logical, historical, and evaluative problems that have resulted. In brief, I will demonstrate that Taruskin's terminology is lacking in accuracy, clarity, and consistency, that he persistently resorts to the fallacy of equivocation, and that his criteria collide with each other, producing conclusions that are logically and historically indefensible.

It is clear that Taruskin believes that winning a substantial audience is an important and perhaps necessary criterion for qualifying as a "social" composer; indeed, a central focus of the entire *Oxford History of Western Music* project appears to be that of validating the work of composers who were successful in their own time, many of whom have since been neglected. It is fairly obvious that a

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Citations from Taruskin's texts will appear with the transliterations of Russian names he employs (i.e., "Chaikovsky," etc.), whereas I will employ traditional transliterations ("Tchaikovsky," etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Attention should be paid to the fact that Taruskin's presentations of two of the composers discussed in the case studies, namely Tchaikovsky and Reich, are based largely on previously-written advocacy articles for these composers, in Tchaikovsky's case in a scholarly publication (the two chapters mentioned in the previous footnote), and in Reich's case in a newspaper article that is very nearly a publicity blurb for the composer ("A Sturdy Musical Bridge to the 21st Century," *The New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/24/arts/a-sturdy-musical-bridge-to-the-21stcentury.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>, accessed July 3, 2013). Given the scope of the *Oxford History* enterprise, it is understandable that the author would need to re-use some of his earlier writings. However, recycling precisely these advocacy articles is difficult to understand in light of Taruskin's explicit promise in the Introduction of Vol. 1 (p. XIV) that he would avoid either advocacy or denigration of the composers treated in the *Oxford History*.

composer whose music was rarely performed in his or her lifetime could scarcely be considered a "social" composer. However, given the ultimately successful career of a supposedly "asocial" composer such as Richard Wagner, it appears that achieving a substantial audience is not in itself enough to qualify a composer as "social."

In his discussion of Tchaikovsky's symphonic music both in Vol. 3, pp. 789-801 and in the article on which this is largely based, "Chaikovsky and the Human" (op. cit.), Taruskin gives a detailed picture both of the close relationship Tchaikovsky had with his patrons and of his eagerness to meet his intended audience's tastes, this treated as a diametrically opposite attitude to that held by "asocial" composers. In Vol. 5, pp. 221-4, in a discussion concerning the origins of what Taruskin views as a crisis of twentieth-century music, namely the dichotomy of elite culture and culture situated in society, he sets the "antisocial" New German school against the "populism and social activism of Romantic opera." (p. 222). In this passage, Taruskin claims that Tchaikovsky "ultimately came to regard himself primarily as an operatic composer. For [citing Tchaikovsky] 'opera and only opera brings you close to people, allies you with a real public, makes you the property not merely of separate little circles but—with luck—of the whole nation.'" (p. 223). Thus, it comes as no surprise that in his discussion of Tchaikovsky's symphonic output on pp. 789-801 of Vol. 3, Taruskin emphasizes the powerful influence of opera conventions upon it and attempts to isolate it completely from the Germanic symphonic tradition. It appears that a "social" composer intends to meet audience needs and favors "social" genres such as opera.

In the passage in Vol. 5 that immediately follows Taruskin's claim that Tchaikovsky was primarily an operatic composer, Taruskin treats Benjamin Britten and Elliott Carter as twentieth-century analogues of the "dialectical" nineteenth-century antipodes of Tchaikovsky, the populist opera composer, and Johannes Brahms, the "asocial" beneficiary of "museum culture";<sup>5</sup> these in turn appear to be heirs of the "dialectical" antipodes of Beethoven, the "asocial" composer of absolute music, and Rossini, the "social" operatic composer. All of these composers serve as pawns within Taruskin's grand historical scheme, in which an ever-greater wedge is driven between the long-suffering audience and composers seduced by the "poietic fallacy" into realizing their personal expressive visions. In Taruskin's view, this has led to the contemporary split between "elite" validations

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<sup>5</sup> In Taruskin's scheme, the "asocial" Germanic pole actually consists of two dramatically different approaches toward composition, namely the German Classicism of Brahms and the New German School of Liszt, Wagner, et al. This leaves Taruskin with the hopeless task of portraying these two camps, whose often warring interaction demonstrably had a significant impact on musical history, as variants of the same "asocial/antisocial" tendency. In place of this historically real conflict, Taruskin posits as of central historical significance a "dialectical" opposition between, on the one hand, his fusion of both Germanic camps into an "asocial/antisocial" trend and, on the other, the lone "social" composer Tchaikovsky. Such a conflict was scarcely acknowledged in its own time and had almost no impact on later musical history. This is surely an unusual manner of recounting "true history."

of "asocial" composers and denigration of those "social" composers who have catered to audience/consumer tastes. Here adherence to one or the other compositional ideology appears to be the primary factor in distinguishing a "social" from an "asocial" composer.

The interaction of the criteria of successfully meeting audience needs (or not), composer's intention, choice of genre, and ideology will be examined more closely after terminological problems have been addressed.

The author's claims and terminology here are remarkably unreliable. It should be obvious that most Romantic opera was anything but "socially activist" as this term is understood currently; the term, implying protest actions against the ruling powers for goals such as civil rights or a fairer society, is anachronistic when applied to nineteenth century opera. Very few opera plots in this century were primarily about slaves rising up against their masters or oppressed groups protesting for their rights. Instead, the overwhelming majority of plots were escapist in nature, focused on love, thrills, and adventure. Many plots did involve nationalist themes, but most of these reflected and ratified the values of those already in power in the area.<sup>6</sup> Coded protests (something strikingly absent from Tchaikovsky's operas) did appear in some Italian operas, but the opera institution itself was not "socially activist."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Snowman, in *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), notes on pp. 187-188 that the founding of Prague's National Theater in 1881 was shortly thereafter followed by the founding of the Deutsches Theater by the German community in another part of the city, with each opera house serving to ratify the values of its own community. However, control was much more centralized in Russia. On p. 191, Snowman remarks that although opera houses could be found in major centers of the non-Russian population, "these cities were essentially local outposts of tsarism, their theatrical offerings and audiences necessarily mirrors of the tastes and styles of St. Petersburg. None was a centre of emergent national culture."

For the use of opera for the purposes of building national consciousness, see also Krisztina Lajosi, "National Opera and Nineteenth-Century Nation Building in East-Central Europe," *Neohelicon* 32 #1 (2005), pp. 51-69 and "Shaping the Voice of the People in Nineteenth-Century Operas," in *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin (Leiden, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), pp. 27-47.

<sup>7</sup> Murray Frame's *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) demonstrates that in Russia it was not opera, but rather privately-run theater performances that were perceived by the Russian government as a primary danger for social uprest; see, for example, pp. 81-82. Within the two capitals (Moscow and St Petersburg), the Imperial Theaters had an official monopoly on dramatic, operatic, balletic, and concert performances until 1882. The primary audience for the opera was the aristocracy, and operas performed within the two capitals were presented almost exclusively within the Imperial Theaters. Within these theaters, most of the auditorium was reserved by subscription, allowing relatively few non-aristocrats to attend. On p. 92, Frame summarizes an 1881 appeal for a national theater by the leading Russian playwright of the nineteenth century, Alexander Ostrovsky, as follows:

[T]he growing industrial and merchant class was deprived of theatricals because only the Maliy [Theater] was allowed to stage drama (by this time the Bolshoi was largely reserved for opera and ballet), and even this was reserved mainly for the 'official public'...

A similar problem appears in Taruskin's anachronistic and equivocal treatment of terms such as "society," "the audience," or "the public." When discussing nineteenth-century music, Taruskin anachronistically uses "the audience" or "the public" in the way that a modern democratic society would tend to use them, namely as representing the mass audience, or the entire (mass) public. However, Europe in the nineteenth century consisted predominantly of non-democratic, hierarchically stratified social structures. In this arena, "society" often connoted a restricted subset—namely, "good society"—of the broader "society at large," which is the usual modern connotation (as in, "all the members of a given country"). The former narrower connotation has nearly vanished from current usage, although it still appears in terms such as newspaper "society pages," "introduction to society," and the like. "Society" in a broader sense did not have the neutral meaning it enjoys in modern sociology, but instead tended to refer to the "proper social order," with aristocrats, and later wealthy bourgeoisie, sitting atop it. In his discussion of nineteenth-century music, Taruskin employs the term "social" as though it had the modern broader and neutral connotations, and applies the anachronistic terms "asocial" (from twentieth-century psychology) or "antisocial" (a term that is pejorative and ideologically loaded when used in this fashion)—to small social and civic groups.<sup>8</sup> However, in the nineteenth century, small, wealthy groups such as the regular subscribers to the Imperial Theaters in Russia or the social stratum that supported Johannes Brahms in Vienna were widely viewed as constituting "society" in the narrow sense (i.e., "good society").

What is more, civil society in the nineteenth century blossomed as a result of small groups founding organizations at least partially independent of direct control by the state, such as the philharmonic societies that arose throughout Europe, reading circles, private theaters, and the like. A notable Russian example of this tendency was the founding in 1859, by Anton Rubinstein and Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, of the Russian Musical Society. This Society played a central role in Russian musical culture, providing first performances of many works by Russian composers, including Tchaikovsky, and leading directly into the founding of the Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatories.<sup>9</sup> Such organizations were viewed in their own time as social in nature; Taruskin, however, appears to

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<sup>8</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2013 online update), the word "asocial" did not even appear in English until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. "Antisocial" has a longer history, dating back to 1797, referring to troublesome political and religious opinions (as in, "all the rebellious, antisocial, blasphemous....books...published during...the [French] Revolution," 1802, *Mem. Life of Sir J. Makintosh*) that would disturb society. In such a usage of "society", what is indubitably intended is the "proper social order." Corresponding terms in other languages do not have precisely the same meanings as the English terms, but similar distinctions and transformations in meaning can be found in them as well.

<sup>9</sup> Taruskin wastes no opportunity to emphasize the Germanocentric tendencies of most of these philharmonic societies, usually sprinkling in furtive warnings about the dangers of ethnocentrism. Unfortunately, he appears to be unaware of his own persistent Germanophobia.

view these manifestations of civic society as "asocial," as they split society as a whole into multiple smaller subsets.

Taruskin chose the citation from Tchaikovsky given above (see Vol. 5, p. 223: "opera and only opera brings you close to people...") in order to support his ideological scheme: the Germanic symphonic tradition had a small, "elitist" public valuing artistic transcendence, truth over beauty, and so forth, and which was therefore "anti-social," as opposed to the larger "social" operatic/theatrical audience, which represented society at large and, by extension, the masses. This portrayal, however, is difficult to square with historical reality. The main public of the Imperial Theaters in Russia, for example, was small and exclusive. Even though the European opera public throughout most of the nineteenth century was perhaps larger than that for symphonic concerts, and opera did play a significant role in "good society," only a relatively small subset of the entire population regularly attended the opera or ballet, whose audience was skewed toward members of "good society."<sup>10</sup> In the nineteenth century, many writers considered

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<sup>10</sup> A vast array of popular theatrical spectacles, music hall revues, and burlesques were performed throughout Europe, but this subject is clearly ancillary to the primary focus of the *Oxford History*.

Opera was doubtless an important part of urban life, especially in large cities, and it is likely that a large percentage of the nobility and upper bourgeoisie saw or at least knew about important theatrical and operatic events. In addition, it was common to hear popular arias performed by musicians in the street, in taverns, and the like, and arias were also performed in countless middle-class homes. However, this does not justify the commonplace assumption in the current wave of academic publications centered on opera that, to use Julie A. Buckler's opening phrase in the first page of her book, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), "Opera represents the culture that stages it." The "poems, stories, novels, and memoirs" Buckler cites in support of her claim were the work of a tiny stratum of Russia's population.

Then as now, live attendance at operatic performances was an urban phenomenon, and throughout most of Europe, the urban dwellers constituted a clear minority of the population. See, for example, D. B. Grigg, *Population Growth and Agrarian Change: An Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 202-203, where the approximate percentage of urban dwellers in France, using a city or town population of 3,000 as a threshold, was 14.3% in 1811, 15.4% in 1841, and only reached 34.9% in 1911. Rondo Cameron, in *A Concise Economic History of the World from Paleolithic Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 194-195, using a lower city/town population of 2,000 as a threshold (which was, in general, far too small to support an opera house), estimates that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the percentage of urban dwellers in England, easily the most urbanized large country in Europe, was 30%, rising to 75% by the beginning of the twentieth century. Cameron estimates that about ten percent of East Europeans were urban dwellers at the beginning of the nineteenth century and ca. 12.5% of Russians were urban dwellers at the beginning of the twentieth century, even though Russia boasted of two Imperial cities, St. Petersburg and Moscow, each with a population of over a million dwellers.

It is important to note that in general only larger urban centers had an opera house, and in France, as Daniel Snowman observes, only Paris offered opera productions of decent quality (op. cit., pp. 161-162). On p. 161, Snowman emphasizes that only a small percentage of Parisians visited the opera houses:

these audiences as representative of the entire nation, but this is because this stratum of society tended to hold much of the power; compared to them, the majority of people, above all the poor, simply did not matter very much.<sup>11</sup>

Authors such as Roberto Leydi and John Rosselli have questioned the common sorts of myths about opera reaching or reflecting "the whole nation" represented by the quotation from Tchaikovsky's letter that Taruskin chose to emphasize. In his article, "The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera,"<sup>12</sup> Leydi writes the following:

But after John Rosselli's illuminating study, we have no need to waste any more words...on demonstrating the fundamental, effective alienation of the people—in their true, cultural, social, and economic connotation—from the life of the opera house. The costs and the rigidly hierarchical structure of the opera house did not allow the masses to take any direct part in the development of opera; it was accessible only to very marginal fringes of nonprivileged classes, fringes that were in some way connected, in a dependent relationship, to a privileged class

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The great majority of people, even in a great operatic centre such as Paris, probably had little or no interest in opera or the time, energy or money to attend it...You might be familiar with some of the more famous operatic tunes from the outpourings of a local band or barrel organ or a music-box. But this would give little idea of the spectacular multimedia theatricalities produced by Véron and his team at the Opéra...

On p. 158, he notes that attending an opera performance was not financially realistic for most residents of Paris. Steven Huebner's "Opera Audiences in Paris 1830-1870" (*Nineteenth-Century Opera, Vol. 1*, ed. Steven Huebner [Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010], pp. 163-182), offers a detailed sociological survey of the audience composition in Paris's opera houses and the income levels of ordinary laborers. On p. 177 he summarizes as follows:

[I]t is clear...that a large segment of the population must have found it difficult to make ends meet...What this evidence yields for our purposes is that the purchase of 2-franc tickets for the Opéra would have been a sizeable expense to a great many artisans and workers (just as Véron and Cavé had intended in 1831); the Théâtre-Italien in the late 1840s was probably out of reach for even the most prosperous among them.

On p. 178 he further notes that even these less-expensive ticket prices might go up in case of a scarcity of seats, that in such cases a long queue might require a protracted period of waiting that workers could not afford, and that the *amphithéâtre*, where the cheapest seats were to be found, had extremely limited seating capacity: "of 1,800 seats at the Opéra, scarcely 150 could be seated at 2 fr. 50 a head in the *amphithéâtre*."

<sup>11</sup> For an intensive discussion of the history of public representation, see Jürgen Habermas, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991); originally published as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962). For a vivid history of the public nature of opera attendance in France, see James A. Johnson's *Listening in Paris* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> In Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, eds., *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 287-386.

that had, in any case, conceived and constructed (and therefore administered) those theaters in their image. As Rosselli rightly has it, "contemporary statements that 'the people' or 'the lowest class' were to be found in the gallery suggest, more than anything else, the restrictive definition of 'the people' common in the early nineteenth century. Labourers, peasants, beggars were not 'the people.'" <sup>13</sup> In that representation of society, the people consisted of artisans, small traders, and employees and servants of bourgeois and aristocratic families... <sup>14</sup>

He also observes, citing Rosselli, that

"[o]pera in the first two-thirds of the [nineteenth] century...can scarcely be called a popular art within the opera house, a building most of which was taken up by the well-off [*benestanti*] with perhaps a gallery occupied by artisans...How far was it a popular art outside through the kind of diffusion" <sup>15</sup> represented by performances given by bands, choirs, the church organ, or by the mechanical pianos pushed through the streets? <sup>16</sup>

The audiences were even more stratified in Russia than elsewhere in Europe. There opera appeared chiefly in a small number of Imperial Theaters with high ticket-admission prices, and most of the population rarely or ever set foot in an opera house. <sup>17</sup> Thus, when Tchaikovsky spoke of the "real public" of the opera

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<sup>13</sup> John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: the Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Leydi, p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> Rosselli, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> Leydi, p. 294. Chapter Three of Rosselli's book, entitled "An industry in a hierarchical society," pp. 38-80, presents a thorough sociological overview, both broad in scope and with detailed statistical support, demonstrating the highly hierarchical nature of Italian operatic institutions throughout the bulk of the nineteenth century. There was a clear hierarchy in theatrical forms stretching from the most elitist form, *opera seria*, to *opera semiseria*, to *opera buffa*, to spoken plays, and down to equestrian spectacle, street theater, and so forth (p. 40), with different social classes predominant in the audiences for the various forms (see, for example, pp. 44-45). *Opera seria*, which included the serious operas of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Giuseppe Verdi, was the preserve of the aristocracy and upper classes. Although the operatic institution was perhaps the central social institution for many cities, it was so not in the Taruskian "socially activist" sense, but rather in the sense of an exclusive English gentleman's club (see, for example, p. 41), where one could interact with other members of "good society" and where one could gamble (see especially pp. 28-30). On p. 28, Rosselli notes that "Gambling promotion was an entry to the running of opera seasons for the simple reason that as the centre of social life the opera house was usually the place where the upper classes gambled: that was the purpose of the spacious foyers in eighteenth-century Italian opera houses."

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Murray Frame, *The St. Petersburg Imperial Theaters: Stage and State in Revolutionary Russia, 1900-1920* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., Inc., Publishers, 2000), p. 83: "In conclusion, the profile of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theater audience portrays auditoria dominated by aged and wealthy patrons whose attendance was a high-profile social occasion...The Imperial Theaters thus constituted a cultural club for the St. Petersburg elite, an arena where they might identify themselves as members of an exclusive circle." Frame does indicate that some members of the lower orders were in attendance, but the primary audience clearly consisted of "good society." See also p. 73 ff. for a discussion of the types of audiences likely to be found at the various St. Petersburg theaters. Although this book focuses on the the period immediately after Tchaikovsky's



house, it was simply wishful thinking on his part to believe that their tastes actually represented those of the whole nation. In his ballets and operas, Tchaikovsky was perhaps writing for a larger audience than when he was writing his symphonies, but neither public remotely approached in size or sociological range the mass public of modern media events.

Indeed, the "social/asocial" dichotomy itself is something that belongs to post-nineteenth century sociology, psychology and politics, not to the mainstream of nineteenth century discourse, and then only as behavior types for individuals and groups, not as characteristics of artworks or artistic movements. The historical record appears empty of self-proclaimed "antisocial" artistic movements with "asocial" manifestos. Taruskin's application of these terms to nineteenth-century musical works, genres, and aesthetic movements is anachronistic and very nearly nonsensical, as is his similarly-grounded attempt at practicing pop-psychology diagnosis upon nineteenth-century composers.

It is difficult to understand how Taruskin's various criteria for judging a composer to be "social" or "antisocial" can produce logically and historically defensible results when they interact with each other. The criterion of winning an audience (or not) appears to rest on the assumption that a successful "social" composer manages to meet the needs of a specific audience or specific audiences (not "the audience," as the term is often used by Taruskin, because this is little more than an abstraction); this allows Taruskin to disqualify a composer such as Wagner, given that he views Wagner as re-shaping audience needs instead of meeting them. However, Taruskin's definition of these needs is amorphous; indeed, it is difficult to imagine how one could specify all of the multifarious and constantly altering and proliferating needs that arise in humans. Surely Taruskin

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death, Frame's description of the Imperial Theater audiences holds in general for the late nineteenth century as well.

Dramatic theatrical performances were far more common than opera performances; on p. 128 of Frame's *School for Citizens*, op. cit., the author cites estimates that by the early 1890s there were six opera (and twenty-four operetta) theaters in the provincial urban centers and 127 dramatic theaters. However, caution must be exercised in assuming the same sort of diffusion for theater that is common in the age of mass media. On p. 76, Frame cites an estimate that the plays of Alexander Ostrovky, by far the most prominent Russian playwright of the nineteenth century, were presented approximately 3000 times in the two main Imperial Theaters and approximately 20,000 times in regional theaters over a period of four decades. However, the total number of spectators nevertheless constituted a relatively small percentage of the total number of inhabitants of Russia during this period (at most ten per cent, but probably far less, given that the number cited—10,000,000 attendees—would include a large number of people who attended the same play multiple times, or who attended multiple plays by the same playwright). Tchaikovsky's operas and ballets were rarely performed outside of the Imperial Theaters and were presented exponentially less often than Ostrovky's plays.

To give some indication of the contrast in scale between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century methods of diffusion, a single televised broadcast of the first performance of Aaron Copland's orchestral work *Connotations* in 1962 reached some 26,000,000 viewers (Alan Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007], p. 382).

must admit that the fervent interest in Wagner's new ideas and music throughout his career must have satisfied at least some audience needs. How could he claim that these new needs were not real needs? Or does he believe that there is a core, unchanging set of needs in humans, and that it is improper for any artist to stimulate new needs into existence?<sup>18</sup> If this is the case, then perhaps most of Western art music should be condemned as "asocial." It is more reasonable to assume that audience needs are not static, but rather change with time, and that composers can stimulate new needs in audiences.

As for the intent of composers, "social" composers apparently aim to satisfy audience needs (as can be seen in Taruskin's portrayal of Tchaikovsky in "Chaikovsky and the Human," op. cit.), and "asocial" composers are indifferent or hostile to current audience tastes, value truth over beauty, cherish extremes of emotional experience,<sup>19</sup> or aim for new sorts of aesthetic goals. Out of the possible interactions between these two criteria alone—i.e., aiming to satisfy audience needs (or not) and winning an audience (or not)—a mass of confusion arises, such that "social" acceptance of the music might follow from "asocial" intent, or "asocial" rejection of the music might follow from "social" intent. In the following list of possible career paths for composers, only the first four would meet both criteria. However, it would offend common sense to consider these as ideal models for a "social" composer.

"Social" composers:

- A talented composer succeeds in winning the support of patrons through deceit and trickery and despises the audience, but is clever enough to know how to meet its needs.
- A composer with connections to celebrities, a famous name, and little extraordinary talent except for making connections wends his (or her) way into the circuit of official patronage and commission; the composer's name is soon on everyone's lips, and he (or she) writes a flashy, empty piece for each occasion, satisfying the audience's need to hear the music of a famous composer.
- A composer without a trace of originality moves to a small community and satisfies audience tastes by copying music from fine composers this audience does not know, passing this music off as his (or her) own; the composer is beloved and honored after death.
- A composer assiduously strives to meet the needs of a tiny sliver of the richest and most powerful stratum of a highly authoritarian, stratified, and repressive society, and convinces him- or herself that these needs are representative of

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<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to give credence to a claim that listener needs are not to some degree focused and altered—indeed, perhaps even re-shaped—by the music that people hear on a regular basis. This is true even when the music is written by "social" composers, who supposedly know the secret of meeting listener needs perfectly.

<sup>19</sup> In both "Chaikovsky and the Human," op. cit., p. 253, and in the *Oxford History*, Taruskin cites an anecdote about the "asocial" Berlioz weeping at a concert of Beethoven's music and replying to a neighbor's query with "Madame, do you think I am here to enjoy myself?"

those of the vast majority of the country's citizens, most of whom have no access to these elite cultural goods.

Possibly "social" composer:

A composer aims to meet audience needs throughout his (or her) life and does for a short time, but tastes change, with the music soon considered hopelessly old-fashioned.

"Asocial" composers:

A highly talented composer aims to meet audience needs, but misunderstands those needs.

A highly talented composer aims to meet audience needs, but does not realize that the audience is split into irreconcilable factions; the music pleases one faction but enrages another.

A highly talented composer aims to meet audience needs, but cannot write for that audience, as a less talented composer has been given precedence owing to connections with the nobility.

A brilliantly trained tonal composer ends up working in a community whose audience is hungry for daring, innovative music. The composer wants to offer his (or her) audience music with deep emotion, but cannot satisfy the audience's desire for avant-garde exploration; eventually the composer grows bitter and stops writing music.

A composer with unusual talents has little interest in meeting audience needs, but through a happy coincidence ends up becoming extremely popular with a relatively small but loyal following.

A composer cares little for the larger audience but fosters a subset of the audience, leading to eventual acceptance by the larger audience.

A composer challenges complacent audience habits; a substantial portion of the audience, after a short period of conflict, comes to appreciate the challenge and considers itself enriched by the composer's music, whereas a minority of the audience never accepts the music.

A composer disregards traditional audience needs, yet builds mysteries in the music that intrigue the audience far more than generic music.

A composer has contempt for audience tastes, but owing to unusual qualities in the music and extraordinary talent, after several decades attracts a large audience.

A composer writes a tremendous amount of music of the highest quality, but consistently fails to win public approval, has only indifferent success, and never attracts a large following; after his death, he (or she) becomes one of the world's most beloved composers.

One can develop these possibilities almost *ad infinitum*, and supply historical examples for each. It is particularly apt in this regard to compare the real-world impact of the instrumental music of the incipiently "asocial" Beethoven and the "social" composer Tchaikovsky. However often Taruskin plays the childish game of referring to fervent admirers of Beethoven's music as a "cult," it would be difficult for him to deny the facts that this music has aroused tremendous audience interest and has abundantly satisfied audience needs for over two hundred years, becoming the centerpiece of the symphonic tradition. Tchaikovsky's symphonic

music, for all its fine qualities, has maintained neither as strong an impact, nor a remotely comparable influence. This cannot be entirely laid at the door of conniving "asocial" critics or misguided audiences. Were these audiences misguided in valuing Beethoven's music as much as they demonstrably did? This would certainly be an odd judgment to reach with a methodology that treats audience responses as the central locus of musical meaning. At some point, Taruskin needs to acknowledge that relatively few of his beloved "social" composers have been audience favorites long beyond their own lifetimes, whereas some "asocial" composers have continuously been audience favorites.

Taruskin often appears to treat a composer as "social" or "asocial" if he or she follows one or the other aesthetic program, with a "social" composer choosing neo-Aristotelian generic principles and an "asocial" composer favoring *poiesis* over satisfaction of audience tastes. He also appears to consider composers who primarily wrote for the "socially activist" opera genre to be more "social" than those who follow the tradition of absolute symphonic and instrumental music.

Again, contradictions soon appear. Although Wagner was a tremendously successful and influential German operatic composer, his "asocial" ideology apparently trumps his composing almost exclusively in a "socially activist" genre.<sup>20</sup> Although only a minority of Tchaikovsky's output is operatic, he is classified as primarily an operatic composer, apparently because Tchaikovsky had "social" aims of pleasing his audience and conformed to "eighteenth century" (i.e., generic) practices.<sup>21</sup> This also apparently imbues his symphonic music with "operatic terror" (see the discussion of his Fourth Symphony below) and exempts it from the German "asocial" symphonic tradition.

Taruskin avoids facing the possibility that a composer following an "asocial" aesthetic orientation might have a tremendous flair for theatrical impact and creative gifts surpassing those of more "socially" minded composers. One must

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<sup>20</sup> The confusion concerning Wagner runs far deeper than this. In Vol. 3, p. 562, Taruskin writes of "estheticist" attempts to depoliticize Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as follows: "And that is how an art conceived in politics and dedicated to social utopia has been resolutely depoliticized and desocialized..." Thus, Taruskin chastizes those who would "desocialize" Wagner's "social utopia." However, he considers Wagner to be a paragon of the "antisocial" composer type, despite Wagner's life-long endeavors to realize his social-utopian aims through his operatic works. Until Wagner entered the picture, Taruskin considered opera to be a paradigmatic "social" genre.

One might object that Wagner considered his operas to be dramas rather than operas; he called each work a *Stück*, the German term for "drama," and the term "music drama" apparently was invented by one of his followers. However, Wagner's early operas such as *Tannhäuser* were performed continuously throughout Central Europe in opera houses, and his later *Stücke* are also almost exclusively performed in opera houses. What is more, even if one labels these works as "dramas" rather than "operas," one must accept the fact that theatrical drama was considered more directly in contact with society and more apt to touch on political issues than opera, which tended to be more exclusive and apolitical; this was especially the case in Russia.

<sup>21</sup> One suspects that underlying Taruskin's classificatory decision was a more simple criterion: because Tchaikovsky is Taruskin's archetypical social composer in a "social/asocial" dichotomy, it was necessary for Taruskin to consider Tchaikovsky primarily—in Taruskin's recounting, even essentially—an operatic (= "socially activist") composer.

return again to Wagner. Even if he failed to satisfy consistently contemporaneous audience tastes—indeed holding many of these tastes in contempt—and followed a utopian aesthetic program, nevertheless, by the end of his life he was one of the world's most successful composers, he re-shaped audience tastes in a significant manner, and his aesthetic program turned out to be perhaps the most broadly influential that any composer has ever achieved, affecting the arts of poetry, the novel, painting, drama, stagecraft, dance, and cinema—and, alas, the domain of politics as well. If one considers satisfying audience tastes to be a primary criterion for qualifying as a "social" composer, how could one refuse to acknowledge the sheer theatrical bravura of the opening and closing scenes of *Das Rheingold*, or that the magic fire music at the end of *Die Walküre* has entranced audiences for the last hundred-fifty years?

Perhaps the most credible approach toward defining a "social" composer can be found in Taruskin's article, "Chaikovsky and the Human," especially pp. 259 ff., where Taruskin emphasizes Tchaikovsky's concern for and close interaction with his intended audience's needs. However, even granting Taruskin his somewhat idealized portrait,<sup>22</sup> significant concerns quickly arise. Taruskin appears to believe

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<sup>22</sup> Two of the passages from Tchaikovsky's letters cited by Taruskin in "Chaikovsky and the Human," op. cit., indicate the difficulty Taruskin faces in fitting Tchaikovsky neatly into a "social" profile. On p. 259, Taruskin quotes Tchaikovsky as follows: "What a joy it is to be an artist! In this sorry age we are living through, art and art alone can distract us from hard reality....I am totally isolated from all the tormenting questions that weigh upon us all...[E]ach serves the common good in his own way and art, in my opinion, is a human necessity. Outside of my own musical sphere I am in any case incapable of being of service to my fellow man." On p. 260, Taruskin cites Tchaikovsky's description of a need to escape the audience immediately after an artistic triumph. This behavior seems the furthest thing from what most twentieth century musicians would consider characteristic of a "social composer," and is notably different from the behavior of Schubert, who joyfully participated in Schubertiades with his friends. Taruskin therefore attempts to distinguish Tchaikovsky the artist from Tchaikovsky the human, with his self-confessed misanthropy, but this appears to weaken considerably his rationale for distinguishing "social" and "asocial" artists, as the attitude of a composer toward other humans would not really matter: the human might hate the audience while the artist loved it, as though two opposite entities co-existed within the sort of composer-entity known as "Tchaikovsky," "Wagner," "Brahms," and so forth. Taruskin asserts that "As an artist, Tchaikovsky was a thoroughly social being," (p. 260), but this appears to confuse matters yet more. The "social being" that any of his patrons and audience would have seen was the human being named Tchaikovsky, who was not composing while he was interacting with them. The artist Tchaikovsky was the one composing in solitude and reveling in this isolation.

Tchaikovsky treats art as an escape from reality—which includes the whole political reality of his time—yet asserts that art (as escape) is necessary for everyone. This is clearly a convenient belief for a composer to hold who claims that the only way he can serve others is via his art (which is surely an overstatement, as Tchaikovsky was perfectly capable of helping other human beings in need). One wonders if Tchaikovsky would have changed these beliefs had he discovered that his audience found them trivial or offensive. What would he have done, for example, if the tsar had demanded that he stop writing escapist works and instead compose exclusively music for ceremonial state functions, or if Mme. von Meck had demanded that Tchaikovsky devote himself exclusively to writing songs for members of her family? Would Taruskin still consider him a "social" composer?

that Tchaikovsky's good intentions to meet his patrons' and intended audiences' needs were responsible both for those needs being met and for those extraordinary qualities in his music that obviously fascinate Taruskin (is this not an almost perfect definition of the "intentional fallacy"?<sup>23</sup>). In fact, many composers have satisfied their patrons without having ever written a note of memorable music. And even if Tchaikovsky did manage to interact successfully with his intended audience, one must nevertheless acknowledge that this was a quite restricted aristocratic island within a semi-feudalistic society: Tchaikovsky was plainly catering to the economic and social elites of a brutally unfair social order, a point Taruskin neglects to emphasize. If one imported this "audience-pleasing" model into the pre-bellum Southern states in America, could one in good conscience effusively praise a poet as "social" who ingratiated himself successfully into the tiny elite of white slave-owners?

The further one gets into this discussion, however, the more one wonders what is so exceptional about the Tchaikovsky that Taruskin presents for us. Are not all composers who are worldly successes alike in the fact that they somehow manage to satisfy their audiences' tastes, flatter their patrons, and the like? One could define a "social" composer as one who succeeds in these aims, but then "social" would have the same basic meaning as "successful." Is it not rather the case that Taruskin, despite his protestations, in fact believes that some extraordinary "immanent" qualities of Tchaikovsky's music have managed to transcend their original context, allowing later audiences to discover beauties in them that their original audiences did not notice?<sup>24</sup> Indeed, is not Taruskin's detailed and insightful discussion of Tchaikovsky's orchestral suites in

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One should note that in "Chaikovsky and the Human," unlike the presentation in the *Oxford History*, Taruskin does allow us to see some of Tchaikovsky's reactionary political views, such as his belief that there should be no limits on the tsar's authority (pp. 280-281). In the passage cited above (fn. 43, p. 259), Tchaikovsky considered his time to be "sorry" because a female revolutionist had been acquitted of charges of attempting to assassinate a governor. Taruskin notes that Tchaikovsky lamented "a breakdown of public morality in the name of futile liberalism" and quotes his "pity for our poor, kind sovereign." The "poor sovereign" was of course the autocratic, nationalist, and anti-liberal Tsar Alexander III.

It is highly unlikely that most social activists would view Tchaikovsky's approach to art (and even less so his politics) as social. Taruskin on p. 275 attempts to counter such objections by claiming that Bertolt Brecht's scorn for "culinary" art was "just another surfacing...of the old heroic discourse of transcendence," placing him in the "old Teutonic line, with Beethoven, Nietzsche, Wagner, and all those other audience-tormentors who saw art as an agency of world transformation." This is a spectacularly incorrect claim: Brecht explicitly distanced himself from transcendent aims in art and placed himself intentionally outside of the line Taruskin forces him into. Brecht's art was intended to work in the service of radical political change and was subsidiary to this goal, whereas Beethoven, Nietzsche, and Wagner would have scorned such an attitude.

<sup>23</sup> W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. 3-18.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Taruskin on p. 284 of "Chaikovsky and the Human" describes *The Queen of Spades* as a "masterpiece of surrealism," and on p. 299 casually mentions Freud's conception of Fate in relationship to Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony.

"Chaikovsky and the Human" implicitly a claim that today's audiences *should* value them more than they do, and perhaps more than Tchaikovsky's own audiences did? Once the discussion shifts to the quality of what Tchaikovsky the artist achieved, Taruskin's strenuous emphasis on Tchaikovsky's aims to please his audience appear somewhat irrelevant.<sup>25</sup>

It would clearly undermine the narrative force of Taruskin's social/asocial conceit to admit what should be obvious, namely that Tchaikovsky was an extraordinarily talented composer who had the good luck to be very successful. The backing he received from his patroness and from the tsar was a necessary condition for the tremendous opportunities he received, even though he did not unerringly meet audience needs of his own time.<sup>26</sup> Surely many of the qualities we now value in Tchaikovsky's work were only vaguely noticed (and if so, perhaps disliked) or went over the heads of most of his listeners. This is certainly one of the weakest aspects of the "audience-response" methodology at the core of Taruskin's entire project: outside of the close assessments both of musicians and patrons within Tchaikovsky's circle (such as his former pupil, Sergei Taneyev, who idolized Tchaikovsky as a composer but was often critical of his music) and of some critics not in his circle, we do not in fact have very much detailed information about what precisely most listeners perceived in Tchaikovsky's music. Perhaps what listeners perceived most distinctly was Tchaikovsky's high status as the tsar's favorite and Russia's national composer—and that his music was in general fairly pleasant to listen to. Of course, anyone who is backed by a powerful institution usually appears smarter, wiser, wittier, more talented, and more accomplished than those who lack this support. It is reasonable to believe that several other composers of the time could have fulfilled Tchaikovsky's role adequately, as long as they did not fail too often or too spectacularly. In fact, Tchaikovsky suffered a clear setback with his first ballet, but still maintained his institutional support, allowing him to compose

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<sup>25</sup> Even more, one must take into account the fact many artists and entertainers succeed despite an attitude of disdain or indifference toward their their audiences. Usually this is owing to their talent, but it might also be owing to brilliant marketing, to sheer luck, to family connections and patronage, to deceit and double-dealing, and the like. And not every composer who has loving intentions to satisfy clients' tastes succeeds; lack of education, lack of economic means, lack of talent, belonging to the wrong social group or race or political party, political intrigue, bad luck, and the like, are enough to scuttle the best of intentions.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), p. 481, where the author describes the significance of Tsar Alexander III's 1888 grant to Tchaikovsky of a lifetime pension of three thousand rubles annually: "...[T]he official support set on the recipients the monarch's personal stamp of approval, making it all but impossible later to disavow those so favored. Any excess or scandal associated with them would, if not suppressed, unavoidably compromise the tsar himself." See also p. 483: "The news of the favor bestowed on Tchaikovsky by the Russian emperor no doubt further boosted the success of the concert tour." Taruskin, in "Chaikovsky and the Human," p. 277, notes that the Tsar's grant made Tchaikovsky "Russia's uncrowned composer laureate...enjoying the freedom of the Tsarist musical establishment in a fashion that put him altogether beyond rivalry...[H]e became a virtual composer-in-residence at the Russian Imperial Theaters..."

two more ballets;<sup>27</sup> for someone lacking such strong imperial connections, a single failure would likely have been enough to end a career. And it is no surprise that the longer Tchaikovsky received imperial support, the more audiences noticed that his music was indeed quite good—which is what one would expect when a talented composer is backed up by an autocrat. However, what makes Tchaikovsky interesting to us now has a relatively small amount to do with his worldly success in his own time.

One must also draw attention to the uncomfortable fact that in terms of the sort of free-market ideology that Taruskin often appears to favor, Tchaikovsky was not particularly successful on the strength of his own efforts. The music of composers such as Rossini, Johann Strauss II, or François-Adrien Boieldieu was widely performed and enjoyed by a great variety of audiences outside of a narrow aristocratic support structure. In contrast, without state and wealthy patron support, Tchaikovsky would not have achieved the great success he did; indeed, he would not have even been able to compose most of the works for large forces that are the centerpiece of his output. The comparison to his "dialectical" opposite, the "asocial" Brahms, is instructive. Brahms spent a great portion of his career writing for and conducting amateur choral societies, which is clearly a social activity. He also succeeded in attracting a sufficient audience for his "asocial" music allowing him to amass a respectable fortune by the end of his life. In free-market terms, it was Brahms, not Tchaikovsky, who was successful as a composer-entrepreneur.

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<sup>27</sup> Roland John Wiley's *Tchaikovsky's Ballets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 50-62, documents the generally poor reaction Tchaikovsky's first ballet *Swan Lake* received in its first production in 1877, despite his best efforts to provide music that would work effectively with the ballet. Although his music received some favorable comment from musicians (see, for example, p. 52), the balletomanes, who formed the core audience for ballet performances, found his music wanting. The music was considered too heavily orchestrated (pp. 52-53), "monotonous and boring" (p. 53), "pallid and monotonous in the extreme" (p. 53), not written to be danced to (p. 53), and the like. The ballet fell out of the repertory by 1883 and was not successful until after the composer's death, when it was re-choreographed and many details of the score were altered.

In addition, Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony was not a great success when it was first performed at a Russian Musical Society concert in Moscow in 1878, although it was a success when performed in St. Petersburg later in the year (see Alexander Poznansky, op. cit., pp. 268-269). This is yet more evidence that Taruskin's "the audience" is by and large a fiction, especially as societies become complex: in the world of reality, different audiences will react to the same piece in different ways. Taruskin might complain that the Germanophile Anton Rubinstein had "infected" the Russian Musical Society with an alien ideology favoring "transcendent" instrumental music over opera. However, Tchaikovsky voluntarily wrote a symphony and allowed it to be performed at the Russian Musical Society, knowing that its audience tended to favor works in the German symphonic heritage. One wonders why Taruskin does not castigate Tchaikovsky for ignoring his audience's tastes, and instead supposedly choosing to compose a work in a mysterious "Franco-Italianate line" (p. 798; this matter will be discussed below).



## B. Case Study One: Tchaikovsky

Beyond the terminological and conceptual problems that beset Taruskin's discussion of Tchaikovsky, numerous acute methodological problems undermine its historical reliability. It is worthwhile investigating Taruskin's presentation of Tchaikovsky and his music in some depth, especially because Taruskin is a respected specialist in Russian music; one would expect his reliability as a historian here to be the greatest. Unfortunately, one discovers an engaging but selective representation of Tchaikovsky's views, including clear cases of Taruskin's tilting the tables toward his favored composer via dexterous shading or withholding of evidence. To this end, in his portrayal of what Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony might possibly have meant to the audience of his own day, Taruskin attempts to undermine the composer's own testimony as to its meaning and omits relevant evidence. Empirical facts were supposed to have supplied the fabric of his "true history," but in this case, in order to satisfy his "asocial/social" thesis, Taruskin is forced to postulate not only a compositional intent on Tchaikovsky's part against which a great deal of evidence militates, but also a robust and well-defined century-long symphonic tradition for which little clear evidence exists.

In a passage discussed above, which contrasts the "asocial" Brahms and the "social" Tchaikovsky (Vol. 5, pp. 221-224), Taruskin posits Tchaikovsky as primarily an opera composer and emphasizes his desire to reach a large public. However, Taruskin's claims concerning the centrality of opera to Tchaikovsky's creative output and concerning Tchaikovsky's close adherence to the approval of "society" (with all the terminological fuzziness discussed above), present just one side of the picture. Including the following passages from Tchaikovsky's letters would have created a more balanced portrait:

(to former pupil Sergei Taneyev) It may well be that you are right in saying that my opera [Eugene Onegin] is not good theatre. My reply to that would be that I don't give a damn for the theatre. It is a fact long since acknowledged that I have not got a drop of theatrical blood in me.

(to Mme. von Meck) The mere fact that an opera may be performed forty times in a season gives it an advantage over a symphony which will be played once in ten years! Yet, despite all the allure of opera, I derive infinitely greater pleasure and enjoyment from writing a symphony, or a sonata, or a quartet...if it turns out that *The Maid [of Orleans]* still does not satisfy the requirements of the operatic style, then it will be clear to me that those who maintain that I am by nature exclusively a symphonic composer who ought not to clamber on to the stage are right. In that case I will never attempt again to write an opera.

(to Mme. von Meck) Despite the fact that I have written six operas, I am very glad that you regard opera as a lower form of art than either symphonic or chamber

music. I have always felt that myself at bottom, and I have probably now abandoned music for the stage for good.<sup>28</sup>

Tchaikovsky evidently had mixed feelings about public approval; at times he sounds like an unregenerate Taruskinian "asocial" "Romantic/Modernist," as when he writes (to Mme. von Meck),

The best moments of my life are those when I can see that my music strikes deep into the heart of those I love and whose sympathy means more to me than fame and success with the public at large.

Do not concern yourself...about my reputation abroad. If it is my destiny to achieve such a reputation it will come of its own accord, although it is very probable that it will only come when I have gone...Fame will come slowly ... if I am destined to be favoured by it. History shows...[that]...a true and just verdict can be reached only by history...Perhaps I accept my modest allocation of fame so indifferently because of my unshakeable faith in the just verdict *of the future*.

But what I am absolutely convinced about is that my symphony must have evoked a spark of sympathy towards my music in certain people's hearts. This is all that I need. I cannot and do not know how to appeal to the massed public. I have noticed that those of my compositions which I have written with the greatest love and effort are doomed at first to failure or to partial success, and it is only gradually that they progress from *certain chosen people* to being understood by the public.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alexandra Orlova, trans. R. M. Davison, *Tchaikovsky: A Self-Portrait* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), respectively, pp. 96, p. 180, and p. 254. The last citation continues, "... though it cannot be denied that opera has the advantage of making it possible to influence the musical sensitivities of the *masses*, whereas the symphonic composer deals with a small and select public." This to some degree supports Taruskin's interpretation, but not unambiguously. It is clear that Tchaikovsky had conflicting feelings about opera and its larger public (and, as noted above, although Tchaikovsky speaks of "the whole nation" and here of "the masses," in fact his operas were primarily performed in the Imperial Theaters for relatively small, mostly aristocratic audiences). In Taruskin's "dialectical" interpretation, such conflicts are swept under the rug, as Tchaikovsky is forced to represent the "social" half of a dichotomy that Taruskin has invented.

Taruskin does admit on p. 223 of Vol. 5 that Tchaikovsky told Mme. von Meck that he placed instrumental music above operatic music, but Taruskin attributes this wholly to Tchaikovsky's conservatory training, rather than allowing that Tchaikovsky might actually have believed what he maintained. Tchaikovsky's conservatory training was doubtless crucial to the development of Tchaikovsky the composer; it is senseless to bracket out this influence whenever Taruskin does not approve of what Tchaikovsky wrote and said.

Although some shortcomings of Orlova's selection and presentation of Tchaikovsky's letters have been noted in various reviews, her volume does effectively give a picture of an artist with many sides, some conflicting with others.

<sup>29</sup> Orlova, *op. cit.*, pp. 116, 118-19, and 189. Taruskin might object that as these letters were written to his patroness, their content was affected by his dependent status. However, other letters to Mme. von Meck demonstrate that Tchaikovsky could write very frankly to her.

I am not an absolute admirer of Berlioz...There is an element of "wanting to please" in him which I cannot accept.<sup>30</sup>

Taruskin uses a discussion of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony (Vol. 3, pp. 791-799) first to rehabilitate Tchaikovsky's reputation as a craftsman in comparison to his "dialectical antithesis" Brahms, and second to juxtapose a composer-centered interpretation (i.e., Tchaikovsky's famous program for the symphony) against Taruskin's favored listener-centered interpretation, warning about the "biographical fallacy" (p. 799), i.e., the danger of treating a composer's interpretation of his or her own work as authoritative.<sup>31</sup>

After portraying Tchaikovsky as a victim of German ethnocentrism,<sup>32</sup> Taruskin asserts that Tchaikovsky chose his symphonic approach "quite deliberately." Here, for some reason, Taruskin revives the "great man" historical method that he had earlier programmatically rejected (Introduction to Vol. 1, p. XVII), requiring the concomitant "gifted interpreter," i.e., Taruskin himself. Thus, according to Taruskin, Tchaikovsky knew *exactly* [added emphasis] what he was doing—despite the many critics who misunderstood and belittled him—in rejecting the motivic approach of Beethoven and Brahms (Vol. 3, p. 791) and the thematic transformation of Lisztian symphonists (p. 791). Taruskin asserts that Tchaikovsky's deviations from the Germanic "straight-and-narrow" were conditioned less by a lack of symphonic aptitude than by the wish to 'express something fully'" (p. 792).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, trans. Galina von Meck, *Letters to his Family: An Autobiography* (Briarcliff Manor, New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> Taruskin does not offer a clear distinction between the sound interpretive method of treating a composer's views of his or her own works as significant evidence, and the unsound method of assuming that they are *necessarily* reliable and authoritative. Indeed, Taruskin, in his attempts to avoid what he incorrectly believes is a "biographical fallacy," very nearly commits a much graver methodological error: he appears to assume that composers' interpretations of their own works are unreliable, without offering any plausible grounds for believing that the interpretations he offers in their stead are any more reliable.

<sup>32</sup> In Vol. 3, p. 791, Taruskin cites a letter from Tchaikovsky to Mme. von Meck concerning his trips abroad and his perception of condescending attitudes on the part of musicians such as Liszt; what Taruskin does not point out here is that Tchaikovsky's letters present a seemingly endless series of complaints during his travels: about the French, about Jews, and so forth. On p. 792, paragraph 2, Taruskin, in response to a racist description of Tchaikovsky by a recent English writer, implies—via the paragraph's lead sentence—that this is the result of "German-dominated literatures of music history." It is likely that most English writers on music would protest mightily if they were told that their highly sophisticated discursive tradition is "German-dominated." This is yet another example of a consistent anti-German bias on Taruskin's part; Germans are apparently responsible for every bad thing that has happened in music over the last two hundred years, whether they were present at the scene of the crime or not.

<sup>33</sup> On p. 791, Taruskin puts the language of Theodor Adorno into Tchaikovsky's mouth, asserting that "For the Russian composer, the German's [Brahms's] virtuosity represented no dialectical triumph but merely an unresolved, and therefore fatal, contradiction." These are clearly not terms that Tchaikovsky used, and do not really make sense. How could such a contradiction (in Tchaikovsky's view, between the pretensions to profundity of Brahms's works, with their

There are indeed a few defensible assertions made in this passage. For example, Tchaikovsky's letters contain repeated criticisms of Brahms's music and place Mozart higher than all other composers. However, the unreliability of Taruskin's entire portrayal is revealed by the rhetorical trick he has played on p. 792, when he asserts that Tchaikovsky was "painfully aware of a deficiency (as he saw it) in Brahms." If Taruskin had written, "aware of what he (i.e., Tchaikovsky) saw as a deficit in Brahms," the subjective nature of the judgment would be clear; if he had written, "painfully aware of his own difficulties with form," he would have accurately summarized Tchaikovsky's embarrassed response to his own music at various points of his career. But as written, it appears that the deficit is objectively in Brahms's music, and that Tchaikovsky saw it clearly; what is implied is that Tchaikovsky saw through Brahms's posing as a Classical master. Here the shortcomings of Taruskin's use of mimicry are revealed with especial clarity. Taruskin has taken a standard critical judgment on Tchaikovsky—i.e., that Tchaikovsky was "painfully aware of his deficiencies with regard to form" (an interpretation supported by numerous of Tchaikovsky's own letters, as will be seen shortly)—and applied it to Brahms, putting this judgment in Tchaikovsky's voice. Taruskin forgot, however, to remove the "painfully". Thus, the sentence as it stands is distinctly implausible: a quick perusal of Tchaikovsky's judgments on Brahms makes it clear that it would be absurd to claim that Tchaikovsky experienced pain upon discovering shortcomings in Brahms's music. In fact, he took great pleasure in finding weaknesses in the music of his compositional rival; he disliked Brahms's music and claimed at least once that he was superior to him as a composer.

What is more, Taruskin's portrayal of Tchaikovsky's self-confident mastery is undermined by the following citations from his letters:

(discussing the Fourth Symphony with his former pupil Taneyev) Fundamentally, my symphony is an imitation of Beethoven's Fifth; that's to say that I imitated the basic conception and not the musical ideas...[In] the middle of the first movement...there are tensions and joins and glueing together; in short, *artificiality*.

(discussing with Mme. von Meck the Fourth Symphony and his constant efforts to improve his craftsmanship) ...I have always suffered...from an inability to cope with the demands of form. Only by persistent hard work have I now reached the position where the form of my compositions more or less corresponds to their content...[T]he *joins* have always been noticeable in my music, there has been a lack of organic connection in the sequence of separate episodes.

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Beethoven-influenced scale and rhetoric, and the small-scale nature of his motivic building blocks) be viewed as "fatal," as though Tchaikovsky were rendering a quasi-Hegelian historical judgment? In the letters by Tchaikovsky to which Taruskin is referring (very likely those excerpted on p. 322 and p. 340 in Orlova, op. cit.), none of this Hegelian rhetoric appears. Tchaikovsky would have needed to adhere to a progressivist-historicist ideology in order to render such a judgment, and even then the chain of reasoning leading to this conclusion appears obscure.

(in a later letter to his brother Modest) I have found a complete collection of my works. Good Lord! what a lot I have written, but how feeble and poorly finished it all is still, how lacking in *technique*.<sup>34</sup>

(1879, to Modest) To make it worse they played Mendelssohn's Reformation Symphony before *The Tempest* and despite my emotional state I appreciated his skill. I have no skill. I still write like a gifted youth who is promising but gives very little. What astonishes me most of all is that my orchestral parts sound so poor!<sup>35</sup>

(1882, to Mily Balakirev) Despite my venerable age and my considerable experience in composing, I must confess that *I am wandering*, still...trying vainly to discover my true pathway.<sup>36</sup>

(1890, discussing the Fifth Symphony with Mme. von Meck) "...there is something repulsive in it, a kind of excessive diversity of color and insincere artificiality. And the public recognizes it instinctively."<sup>37</sup>

These quotations speak well of Tchaikovsky's ethical approach to his chosen art form, but they also indicate that he felt that he had not achieved complete mastery in realizing his aims in symphonic form, that he was conscious of Beethoven's influence on him, and that he was (painfully) aware of his own failings. Taruskin shields the reader from Tchaikovsky's compositional insecurities; instead, as we will see, he presents Tchaikovsky as the master of a "parallel tradition," of a nature so elusive that it is difficult to find a trace of it in Tchaikovsky's letters.

Taruskin then goes on to discuss the famous secret program for the Fourth Symphony that Tchaikovsky provided for Mme. von Meck. This program, centered on submission to Fate, has strongly influenced later interpretations of the symphony. As accepting such an interpretation at face value would undermine Taruskin's "audience-response" project (in that it is the composer's interpretation), he has to cast doubt on its usefulness in interpreting this symphony. He points out the fact that Tchaikovsky never publicly alluded to this interpretation in his lifetime and might have "furnished the symphony with its program at the specific request of the woman who paid his bills" (Vol. 3, p. 793).<sup>38</sup> Taruskin has, perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> Orlova, pp. 121, 131, and 199.

<sup>35</sup> Tchaikovsky, *Letters to his Family*, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>36</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Years of Wandering 1878-1885 [= Vol. 3]* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), p. 322.

<sup>37</sup> Poznansky, op. cit., p. 495.

<sup>38</sup> On p. 793, Taruskin describes the material and unfolding of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony in terms of operatic dramaturgy. "It bespeaks an encoding of events, a narrative—in short a program. So, at any rate, Mme von Meck assumed, and wrote to Chaikovsky to inquire about it." On p. 255 of "Chaikovsky and the Human," op. cit., Taruskin writes that the program was written "for the solitary benefit of the woman who paid his bills," and on p. 269 he writes that the "confessional program" was "outlined for Mme von Meck at her request." On quick reading, one gets the impression that Mme. von Meck assumed that the symphony was operatic in nature and needed a program, that she requested just such a program from the composer, and that the composer

intentionally, neglected to inform the reader of other secret programs to Tchaikovsky's later symphonies, including a program to the Sixth Symphony found in his correspondence (which Tchaikovsky intended to keep secret),<sup>39</sup> and a program draft to the Fifth Symphony found in one of his notebooks, which also focuses on submission to Fate.<sup>40</sup> Taruskin also suggests that the similarity of the Fourth Symphony program to the widely-accepted "fate" program of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony might have been a convenient ruse (p. 793). Taruskin has somehow forgotten the fact that Tchaikovsky explicitly told his former student Taneyev that his Fourth Symphony was modeled on Beethoven's Fifth (citation from Orlova above, p. 121).<sup>41</sup> Taneyev was not paying Tchaikovsky's bills, and he was at times among the composer's strictest musical critics. It is difficult to believe that Tchaikovsky would attempt to play such a ruse on a man whose musical erudition and insight he respected tremendously.

The weakness of Taruskin's logic is particularly apparent here. Even if Tchaikovsky were a Taruskinian "social" composer completely attuned to his listeners' needs and a consummate master of meeting them, his secret program would still possess some authority in interpreting the symphony. There is no rule preventing a "social" composer from turning private concerns into an artwork that manages to communicate powerfully to the public. In fact, this private element might very well satisfy the needs of some listeners, and the reputation of a secret

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dutifully invented something he thought would satisfy her, but which he likely did not believe in himself. Taruskin provides no proof in any of these three places that this is what happened; perhaps he has such evidence, but he has not supplied it. Is it not more likely that Tchaikovsky's patroness was puzzled and intrigued by the symphony, and that the composer wrote up a program (which he may very well have had in mind all along) that expressed, however imperfectly, his perception of his symphony's general meaning and unfolding? If Taruskin is going to make Tchaikovsky primarily an opera composer, then he should acknowledge that the first thing likely to occur to an opera composer, even when writing a symphony, is an implied dramatic scenario.

<sup>39</sup> Poznansky, op. cit., pp. 556-559.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 490-491 and Alexander Poznansky and Brett Langston, *The Tchaikovsky Handbook: A Guide to the Man and His Music, Vol. 1: Thematic Catalogue of Works, Catalogue of Photographs, Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 154. In *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, see also pp. 268-269 concerning the program to the Fourth Symphony. One might also note that Tchaikovsky had earlier composed a symphonic poem entitled *Fatum*, op. 77.

<sup>41</sup> Note that, *pace* Taruskin, accepting the validity of Tchaikovsky's secret program does not require that one commit the "biographical fallacy," as the protagonist in Tchaikovsky's drama of Fate need not be the composer.

Both Tchaikovsky and Taneyev were familiar with the commonplace assumption that Beethoven's Fifth was a "Fate" symphony, which would obviously provide a strong link to the program provided to Mme. von Meck, especially owing to the clear reference to Beethoven's "fate" rhythm from the opening bars of the piece on. In light of these facts, in order to believe Taruskin's story, one would have to assume that Tchaikovsky knew exactly what he was doing with his symphony (i.e., writing an operatic symphony, whose operatic character is supposedly conveyed via an alternation of polonaises and waltzes, as will be explained shortly), yet felt that it was of crucial importance to hide his true purpose from his patroness and his closest confidante. Thus, he invented for his patroness a fake program focused on Fate and told his close confidante that his symphony was based on Beethoven's "Fate" Symphony, hoping that neither one would discover his deception.

program might intrigue listeners yet more. However, because Taruskin wants at all cost to demote composers from their authoritative position, he has to undermine the stated aims even of one of his favorite audience-oriented composers.

Taruskin presents an intriguing reading of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony as based on conventions of representation—which necessarily rely on "similarities and associations" (p. 796)—based on dances and opera. The opening Fate motive is the introductory fanfare of a polonaise (Taruskin cites a parallel passage from *Eugene Onegin*), and the body of the movement employs a waltz topic (Tchaikovsky's testimony here is cited as confirming evidence); Taruskin develops a dramaturgy out of these elements, noting the distorted form of the waltz in the coda. Emphasizing the "non-transcendent" nature of Tchaikovsky's dramaturgy, Taruskin writes that "each beat of the waltz theme, [is] now stretched out to the length of one full measure, and therefore no longer a waltz at all. A moment like this expresses—*fully* expresses—a sublime 'operatic' terror that was altogether outside Brahms's purposes to express, although Berlioz would surely have sympathized" (pp. 797-798).

This interpretation, for all the bravura of its formulation and its often striking insights, is difficult to understand in numerous ways. First, although it makes sense of how Taruskin, the Tchaikovsky expert, understands this work, it does not explain "how it was heard" by audiences in the past. After all, how much documentary evidence exists that anyone understood the symphony then precisely the same way Taruskin does now? How many early reviews refer to "operatic terror," versus those that refer to "abuse of the kettledrums" and the like? How can Taruskin be certain that every early listener in early performances of this symphony was swept off his or her feet in "sublime terror" or "operatic terror" or "just plain terror" at this precise point in Tchaikovsky's symphony? Is it not possible that some listeners reacted with indifference to this passage, that some were irritated by the return of the waltz theme in an overly long first movement, that some were nodding off in slumber, or that some were assessing this piece on the basis of the Beethovenian tradition? After all, in an audience-response aesthetic, even the reactions of those listeners who made the "mistake" of listening to Tchaikovsky's symphony in purely symphonic terms (i.e., in terms of the generic expectations of the symphony as they understood them, which—like it or not—were "infected" by Germanic influence) must be just as valid as those who listened to Tchaikovsky's symphony as a quasi-opera.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Another difficulty is that his interpretation does not make all that much sense for listeners today who do not know Tchaikovsky's music and Russian cultural history as well as Taruskin. Many of these would very likely consider the "conventions of representation" Taruskin mentions to be artificial and bookish; after all, it is no longer common to hear and dance polonaises or waltzes. Thus, many of the "associations and similarities" to social dances that would have been second nature for the nineteenth-century social classes that attended symphony concerts do not exist for modern listeners. In other words, one has to read or be taught about these conventions, a form of interaction that strikes one as extremely "academic," a term Taruskin in Vol. 5 often uses pejoratively.

A second and more severe problem is that Taruskin has not made clear what this "sublime terror" is (what dramatic situation has made it either sublime or terrifying?), nor what dramatic agent is "expressing" (i.e., giving vent to) or suffering from this sublime terror, nor how anyone could distinguish with any degree of precision between this amorphous emotion being expressed "fully," nearly fully, moderately, partially, or not at all. And why is this "sublimity" not "transcendent"—for Taruskin, an "asocial" sin characteristic of German symphonic music?

Third, although the referentiality of the topics Tchaikovsky employs is somewhat clear, the form of the movement is neither that of a waltz or a polonaise. The "waltz," for example, does not have the characteristic four-bar structure of most waltzes, but instead appears in three-bar groups (as perceived) given by the 9/8 meter; the "polonaise" appears in isolated phrases instead of forming characteristic multi-phrase groups; and neither material is presented in a formal structure that corresponds closely to the original dance forms. Taruskin treats the identification of these topics and their interaction as though they had taken care of the bulk of his interpretation, but he in fact has not yet presented a coherent dramaturgy either for a piece of symphonic music or for an opera, however operatic in nature the piece might perhaps be. Why do polonaise introductions keep interrupting waltzes? And why should one instantly assume that polonaises and waltzes connote "opera"? Are "polonaise" and "waltz" in fact the two main characters in this operatic interaction, and is the waltz stricken by "operatic terror" in the coda? Taruskin convincingly demonstrates the similarity of the polonaise-like and waltz-like material in the Fourth Symphony to similar material in his *Eugene Onegin* (Vol. 3, pp. 796-799; in "Chaikovsky and the Human," he repeatedly refers to this opera in his discussion of the symphony), but does this at all lead to the conclusion that an average nineteenth-century audience listening to a symphony containing such materials would have heard them as operatic?

One suspects that listeners could just as likely have associated these dance elements with the ballet than with opera. A continuous linked chain of dance-based music used to create a dramatic form is much more characteristic of ballet than of opera, where, when dance-based music appears, it is usually broken up by dialogue, arias, ensemble scenes, and the like. The rhythm and texture of the opening part of the second theme of the first movement (especially the chromatic descending figures in the woodwinds mm. 117-133 and 296-312) closely resemble numerous passages found in *Pas d'actions* and characteristic dances in Tchaikovsky's ballets (as well as passages found in the ballets of Léo Delibes, which Tchaikovsky greatly admired), the closing bars of the first movement resemble the closing bars of Act III of Tchaikovsky's recently-completed *Swan Lake*, and so forth.<sup>43</sup> In addition,

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<sup>43</sup> A fair portion of the first audiences for Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony might very well have heard the composer's first ballet, *Swan Lake*.

One might object first that these same listeners would likely have heard Tchaikovsky's operas and second that the same sorts of rhythms and textures I have described appear commonly in his operas, leading to the conclusion that listeners would have heard them in operatic terms. But an



there are plentiful examples of nineteenth-century symphonies whose themes are shaped and unfold in a manner corresponding quite directly to conventional operatic arias, but the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony is not one of these. One could just as easily interpret the coda of the first movement as resembling a moment of high balletic drama rather than in terms of "operatic terror." The conventions of representation of symphony and ballet seem capable of explaining at least some of the dramaturgy of this movement, and in fact can be harmonized with the composer's program.<sup>44</sup>

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obvious response is that two crucial sonic/semantic components are found in opera but are absent from both ballet and symphony: a voice and a text (opera and ballet share the element of an explicit dramatic scenario, but in ballet this must be by and large realized in mime, whereas in opera it is articulated in text, sung, and acted out. It should be obvious how great the sonic and affective distinctions between these genres are). The absence of both voice and text so clearly distinguishes orchestral from operatic music that precisely the same textures in a symphony or an opera will likely be perceived in very different ways in each genre. Thus, one should be cautious about assuming that a given texture found in Tchaikovsky's operas would automatically have been perceived in operatic terms when heard in his symphonies; this is all the more the case when the texture is derived from a dance, as in Taruskin's examples. The most reasonable approach is to assume that Tchaikovsky employed a broadly shared musical vocabulary in his symphonic, balletic, and operatic works, with specialized textures and techniques employed in each genre. However, this shared vocabulary would obviously have been perceived differently in each genre, and cannot, *pace* Taruskin, be reduced to an essentialist "operatic/social" register.

Taruskin assumes that a clear vocabulary of dance types similar to that which Wye J. Allanbrook believes Mozart consciously employed in his operas (*Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983]) must also have been employed by Tchaikovsky for expressive purposes (see Vol. 3, p. 798 and "Tchaikovsky and the Human," pp. 292-294, 304, and especially 306). However, Mozart wrote his operas toward the end of an extended historical period in which a rich vocabulary of clearly-defined social dances served as a sort of shared international vocabulary powerfully influencing individual experience. The shared vocabulary of social dances in Tchaikovsky's time was much less extensive and clearly formulated. A large vocabulary of dance types appears in his ballets, but many of these are exotic—i.e., distanced from ordinary experience—and it is unlikely that most of the spectators would have actually participated in these dance types. Thus, the experiential aspect would have been much less direct than in a corresponding situation in Mozart's or Lully's time, and the shared connotations of these dances would most likely have been less clear.

<sup>44</sup> The similarity of passages of the Fourth Symphony to ballet music was clear to Taneyev, to whom Tchaikovsky replied:

Do you mean by ballet music any cheerful tune with a dance rhythm? In that case you ought not to accept most of Beethoven's symphonies...Ballet music is not all bad, you know; there are some good things...All the same I do not understand why a dance tune should not occasionally appear in a symphony, even if only with the intention of adding a touch of vulgar, rough humour. Take Beethoven again: he used this effect more than once...I would not want my pen to produce symphonic works which expressed nothing and were merely an empty play of chords, rhythms, and modulations...Of course my symphony is programmatic but the programme is such that it cannot possibly be formulated in words. That...would have a comic effect. But is this not what a symphony should be i.e. the most lyrical of all musical forms? Should it not express everything for which there are no words but which struggles from the heart in search of expression?...[T]here is

These distinctions are important, because Taruskin continually attempts to collapse both ballet and opera into the "social" category of the theater, as opposed to the "antisocial" domain of the (Germanic) symphony; this is the direct result of his decision to structure this portion of his history on the basis of a "dialectical" opposition. However, the theatrical forms of opera and ballet do not function in the same way. For instance, Taruskin repeatedly emphasizes the non-transcendental nature of Tchaikovsky's music, yet visions of transcendence and moments of sublimity were and still are part and parcel of the balletic stock in trade. In his description of the coda of the first movement on p. 298 of "Chaikovsky and the Human," Taruskin writes,

The fate theme, then, inspires, or expresses, a sublime terror; but unlike the romantic sublime, which depends on a perception of uncanniness, or removal from ordinary human experience, *the Chaikovskian sublime depends, as always, on concrete imagery explicitly derived from shared human experience* [added emphasis].

However, the appearance of a forest full of dancing swans, a fight between a hero and a red-bearded owl, a princess taught to fly by a human-sized bird, an evil fairy attended by rats, or a war between a nutcracker and battalion of mice—all of these being scenes from Tchaikovsky's ballets—scarcely represent concrete

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not a single phrase in that symphony...which is not deeply felt. (Orlova, pp. 120-121)

It is difficult to tell whether Tchaikovsky truly meant what he wrote here, or if this was a defensive reaction to an acute criticism by his former pupil.

One might also draw attention to the fact that Tchaikovsky told Taneyev that there was a program for the Fourth Symphony, but "the program cannot possibly be formulated in words," whereas he told Mme. von Meck that "There is a programme in our symphony, that's to say it is possible to put into words what it is trying to express" (Orlova, p. 107). In reading through a substantial amount of his correspondence, one often (but not always) receives the impression that Tchaikovsky adopted a different persona with each of his close acquaintances. Discovering the composer's fundamental intentions in such cases would require an extremely subtle methodology.

It is striking how unreliable Taruskin is in this regard. He gives little indication of the degree to which Tchaikovsky's own testimony is inconsistent, treating as authoritative those statements of Tchaikovsky's that are useful for his argument, and dismissing those that get in its way.

For example, he draws attention to the fact that Tchaikovsky "expressly labeled one of his themes as a waltz" (p. 796), and on this basis claims that "We already know that one of the codes on which Chaikovsky relied in the Fourth Symphony was that of dance genres." He then searches for other dance forms in the first movement, discovering a polonaise. Its similarity to the polonaise in Eugene Onegin leads him to an operatic interpretation of the movement. This entire chain of reasoning, such as it is, is dependent on the composer's intent. However, Tchaikovsky's response to Taneyev weakens the dance hypothesis as integral to his intent. But of course, compositional intent should not matter if Taruskin were consistently following his audience-response credo: we should only label the first theme a waltz if contemporaneous audiences called it a waltz, the resemblances to *Eugene Onegin* should only matter if they drew attention to these similarities, and so forth.

imagery derived from ordinary human experience.<sup>45</sup> Taruskin's universal claim ("as always") is therefore incorrect.

On p. 799 of Vol. 5, Taruskin makes a similar claim, again collapsing all forms of theatrical presentation into an imagined realism:

...Chaikovsky belonged to the line whose prime "theater of operation" remained literally in the theater, and which therefore drew its musical imagery not from visions of transcendence but from the stock of daily life, human emotion and its vicissitudes.

Taruskin has perhaps forgotten the tremendous number of nineteenth-century plays, operas, and ballets based on fantastic themes, on fairy tales, on myths, on epic poems, and the like. He appears to associate Romantic-era opera with his "daily-life" conception of theater, but his intention here must be "non-Romantic opera," as the numerous operas strongly influenced by the Romantic movement tended to stray quite far from the stock of daily life—this despite the demonstrable fact that they were performed in theaters. We are clearly faced with a bizarre attempt at re-defining the term "theater."

Taruskin appears to be hoping that the connotations of late-nineteenth century realist theatrical drama will rub off on opera. However, it would be the height of naïveté to assume that operatic plots and conventions of representation in the nineteenth century were as close to "the stock of daily life" as some realistic dramatic works were in this period. Two recent detailed studies of nineteenth-century Italian and French opera, the dominant operatic models throughout most of the century, clearly indicate that these art forms were highly stylized, requiring the adherence to a raft of detailed conventions.<sup>46</sup> On a most basic level, it is not part of the "stock of daily life" for people to speak in rhymed quatrains in specific metrical patterns, or to sing in balanced musical periods.

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<sup>45</sup> Taruskin's error-ridden discussion of ballet in Vol. 4 of the *Oxford History* indicates a lack of familiarity with and understanding of this art form. On p. 139 alone, he makes an astonishing series of misstatements and unreliable assertions about basic historical matters, only a portion of which can be addressed here. *Pace* Taruskin, although on paper Marius Petipa remained ballet master at the Maryinsky Theater until his death in 1910, he most emphatically did not actually lead the ballet, but rather was harassed into leaving the company by the new director of the Imperial Theaters, Vladimir Telyakovsky, appointed in 1901. *Pace* Taruskin, the ballets *Don Quixote* and *La Bayadère* are not "occasionally revived," but instead are core works in the Russian ballet repertory. Lev Ivanov's "chief claim to fame" is not his choreography to the *Nutcracker*, but instead the two Lakeside acts (Acts 2 and 4) from *Swan Lake*. Taruskin's statement that "Russia was the only country [after 1870] where one could regularly see 'pure' ballet" would only be true if the entire Danish ballet tradition, which influenced the Russian tradition and has been in continuous existence from 1748 until the present day, had instead mysteriously ceased to exist in 1870. In addition, on p. 137 Taruskin misstates a crucial plot element of the famous ballet *Coppélia*, indicating that he very likely knows the music of this ballet much better than the ballet itself.

<sup>46</sup> Andreas Giger, *Verdi and the French Aesthetic: Verse, stanza, and melody in nineteenth-century opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Nicholas Baragwanath, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini: Compositional Theory and Practice in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

One might note as well that most of Alexander Ostrovsky's plays lean in the direction of realism, whereas only one of Tchaikovsky's is realistic, namely *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>47</sup> Julie Buckler draws attention to the fact that this opera was

particularly troubling to audiences of his time precisely as concerns realism in operatic art. The audience at the initial performances of *Eugene Onegin* in 1879 was shocked to see, in the words of the composer's brother Modest, "landowners, nannies, provincial young ladies, generals, and gentlemen in frock coats, singing arias and duets." ...One critic insisted that opera as "a conventional form of art" dictates that "the story...be pushed into a sufficiently distant past, which we cannot imagine completely clearly."<sup>48</sup>

On pp. 796 ff., Taruskin attempts to bolster his theory that Tchaikovsky's symphonies are non-German, i.e., theatrical (= "social") and non-transcendent in nature, as follows:

Recalling that a great deal of eighteenth-century music, particularly Mozart's, also relied on dance genres and their associations as mediators of musical representation, and knowing that of all composers Chaikovsky loved Mozart best, we are equipped...to interpret Chaikovsky's expressive strategies..and in the process to understand better his deliberate deviation from the structural principles that otherwise reigned in the world of the late-nineteenth-century symphony.

This is surely a striking use of the logical fallacy known as "weak analogy." If one replaces the factually true assertions Taruskin has made about Mozart with other factually true assertions, the following absurd conclusions about Tchaikovsky result:

Mozart liked composing comic canons with doggerel verses.  
Mozart was Tchaikovsky's favorite composer.  
Therefore, Tchaikovsky like composing comic canons with doggerel verses.

Or:

Mozart composed hundreds of minuets.  
Mozart was Tchaikovsky's favorite composer.  
Therefore, Tchaikovsky composed hundreds of minuets (...and because minuets are non-transcendent, we are in a position to understand how he could resist the German transcendent tradition, etc.).

Taruskin explains Tchaikovsky's use of theatrical "conventions of representation" in his symphonies as follows (note how often he associates Tchaikovsky's name with Mozart in the first passage, in a clear attempt to shore up

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<sup>47</sup> In addition, there were well-established realist traditions of acting such as that of Mikhail Shchepkin (see Murray Frame, *School for Citizens*, op. cit.). These scarcely existed in operatic performance traditions.

<sup>48</sup> *The Literary Lurette*, op. cit., p. 120. Note that Taruskin, if he were consistent, should have chastized Tchaikovsky for not meeting audience expectations.

Tchaikovsky's compositional status; this tendency is even more pronounced in the closing pages of "Chaikovsky and the Human," op. cit.):

One begins to suspect the existence of a parallel tradition of the symphony that passed from Mozart to Chaikovsky without passing through Beethoven. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that Chaikovsky was the recipient of...a tradition that goes back to or passes through Mozart in a way that the nineteenth-century Germanic tradition, however reverently its aggressive claim of descent from the "classical masters" has been ratified in conventional historiography, does not.

It is the Franco-Italianate line, which passed from Mozart to Rossini, thence to Auber, Gounod, and Bizet. These were the composers whom Chaikovsky admired, particularly...Léo Delibes, ...whom Chaikovsky venerated as the Mozart of his day. (p. 798)

These are immensely suggestive passages (despite the unpleasant ethnocentric jab), and they open up fascinating avenues for further research. Unfortunately, there are still difficulties Taruskin faces in using these suggestions as a basis for his interpretation of Tchaikovsky's symphonies.

First, Tchaikovsky explicitly asserted that he modeled his symphony on a symphony of Beethoven's, which should make an analyst cautious about claiming that he was actually situating his symphony in a completely different tradition, one that notably excludes Beethoven.

Second, Mozart was not French (nor was he Italian, although he was profoundly influenced by Italian music) and was not widely appreciated in France until decades after his death.<sup>49</sup> Although Gioachino Rossini, the leading Italian operatic composer of the early nineteenth century, studied and admired the music of Mozart, his entire musical aesthetic, especially in his comedies, is clearly different from that of Mozart. It is extremely difficult to find many points of contact between the music of Charles Gounod and that of Rossini. Taruskin appears to have cobbled together his tradition out of several distinct strands.

Third, is there in fact a clear and substantial tradition of theater-symphonies by Rossini, Auber, Gounod, and Bizet (the composers mentioned by Taruskin), given that their sum total of symphonic output is in fact very small? After all, it should be obvious that there is an immense difference between employing operatic materials and procedures successfully in an operatic work or an overture and employing them successfully in a symphony.<sup>50</sup>

Fourth, what is the evidence that this tradition existed in the sense that composers knew about it as a tradition and could decide, "I'm going to compose my next symphony in the Franco-Italian theater-symphony tradition?" At least a name

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<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, James A. Johnson's *Listening in Paris*, op. cit., especially pp. 202-203, 212, and 218.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to deny that themes modeled on bel-canto opera, recitative-like passages, and the like can commonly be found abundantly in symphonic and chamber works throughout the nineteenth century. However, one does not find this tendency only in French and Italian composers, but also in German composers such as Louis Spohr. Indeed, Beethoven's late works, which Taruskin would style as "transcendent," are shot through with fragments of arias and recitatives.

for this parallel tradition must have existed and been recognized among its adherents and audiences. As but one indication of the difficulties Taruskin faces in this regard, one might point out that Anton Reicha, who as professor at the Paris Conservatoire strongly advocated Mozart's music and had a powerful influence on nineteenth-century French composers writing in instrumental forms, makes no mention of this tradition in his four extensive treatises on composition.<sup>51</sup>

Fifth, since Taruskin is following a listener-response methodology, he should be able to provide substantial evidence that listeners going to a symphonic concert would be able to expect either a Germanic transcendent symphony or a Mozart/French/Italianate non-transcendent symphony in order to properly align his or her expectations.

It is clear from Tchaikovsky's music and letters that he was constantly working to develop a conception of the symphony that suited his particular gifts and concerns. It is equally clear, however, that he situates his Fourth Symphony at least partly in Taruskin's despised Germanic tradition,<sup>52</sup> and I have not yet found a reference in Tchaikovsky's letters to Taruskin's alternate tradition.<sup>53</sup> Inventing a parallel tradition might be an effective rhetorical ploy, but it does not give one confidence in Taruskin's reliability as a historian.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Reicha's *Cours de composition musicale* (1818) became the standard manual for composition at the Paris Conservatoire; there is no evidence for this parallel tradition in this book. Nor is this tradition discussed in *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824-1826). Reicha did author a book on composing for opera, *L'art du compositeur dramatique* (1833), but this book had a much smaller impact than that exerted by his *Cours de composition*; Taruskin's parallel tradition is also absent from this book. It is also absent from his *Traité de mélodie* (1814). Although Reicha wrote numerous dramatic works, he was not a successful opera composer, and his instrumental works, some of which very likely influenced his "asocial" friend Beethoven's late works, show little evidence of Taruskin's Italianate-French "non-transcendental" theatrical-symphonic tradition.

<sup>52</sup> Taruskin's attempt to insulate Tchaikovsky from Germanic influence apparently requires that he not mention the Wagnerian echoes in the *Francesca da Rimini* overture, which Tchaikovsky admitted to, or possible Wagnerian echoes in the opening fanfare of the Fourth Symphony; see David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Crisis Years 1874-1878* [= Vol. II] (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), pp. 108-110 and p. 168. One might note as well that works such as *Francesca da Rimini* or the *Manfred Symphony* are scarcely audience-pleasing ditties and stray far from "the stock of daily life." Indeed, they rather tend in the direction of "overburdening the audience" in the "asocial," *poietic* manner of composers such as Franz Liszt or Richard Wagner. Yet both works received positive public support, leading one to wonder if Taruskin believes that these audiences were "infected" by the German transcendental bug.

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Taruskin has access to a hidden trove of evidence demonstrating unequivocally the widely-recognized acknowledgment of this parallel tradition. If so, he has not provided this evidence in his *History*.

<sup>54</sup> One might mention as well the unreliability of Taruskin's claim that "no nineteenth-century composer retained a more thoroughly eighteenth-century outlook on his craft than Chaikovsky" (Vol. 4, p. 141). Taruskin asserted in his Introduction that he would focus on actual human agents (Vol. 1, p. XVIII), rather than impersonal trends and essences. In this light, the anachronistic nature of his assertion becomes clear: how could a late-nineteenth century composer hold on to attitudes of people who lived in different social conditions a century before? It is also essentialist: Taruskin has averaged the attitudes of tens of millions of real humans from the eighteenth century and derived from them an essential outlook, to which he claims Tchaikovsky held allegiance. But Taruskin is an

### C. Case Study Two: Benjamin Britten

Central to Vol. 5 of Taruskin's history are the two "Standoff" chapters dedicated to Benjamin Britten and Elliott Carter. The former, for Taruskin, represents a "social" composer rooted in mass society, the latter an "asocial" composer whose prestige was rooted in the support of elites. Although the presentation of both composers is less nakedly partisan than what comes later in Volume 5, the manner in which Taruskin stacks the deck for Britten and against Carter is revealing.

Taruskin's discussion of Britten's life and work (pp. 225-259) begins by stressing Britten's early "populist" labors writing for movies and is confined almost exclusively to his operatic works, although in terms of numbers, these form the minority of his output. The purpose is obviously to stress the narrative thread: opera is social, and Britten was primarily an operatic composer, just as Tchaikovsky was.<sup>55</sup> Although Taruskin had earlier cast doubt on the inherent quality of the music of many of the great names in the Western tradition, in Britten's case Taruskin considers its inherent quality a confirmed fact. Almost without exception, Taruskin throws into his presentations of other composers at least a few barbs; however, in the discussion of both Britten's music and his person is sympathetic throughout.<sup>56</sup> The subtitle of the discussion of *Peter Grimes* is "A Modern Hero," and it is difficult to tell who the greater hero is, the composer Britten or the character Peter Grimes. After thousands of pages of pulling down the great figures of Western music from their perches, Taruskin's adoring and almost fawning description of Britten's music and career is striking.

Missing from this entire presentation is any serious discussion as to whether critical and cultural elites in Britain might not have contributed greatly to the success of Britten's music, which came to serve internationally as the primary representative of British contemporary music. Although Britten was undoubtedly an exceptionally accomplished composer and a fine craftsman, perhaps Taruskin

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opponent of essentialism; of all people, he should realize that there is no such a thing as an "eighteenth-century outlook"; there are only outlooks of people who lived in the eighteenth century. As is often the case with relativists who have not thought out their rationale carefully, Taruskin consistently falls into the trap of essentialism.

After perusing five volumes of Tchaikovsky's letters, I have not yet found Tchaikovsky make a claim such as the one Taruskin attributes to him. Yet even if Tchaikovsky had made such a claim, if Taruskin had adhered consistently to his own relativist credo, he would have admitted that Tchaikovsky's late-nineteenth century belief that he held an eighteenth-century outlook was anachronistic, essentialist, and so forth.

<sup>55</sup> The claim that Britten was primarily an operatic composer is more solid than the parallel claim for Tchaikovsky, but it suffers from the same essentialism. In fact, both composers viewed themselves as professionals perfectly capable of doing high-quality work in a large variety of genres.

<sup>56</sup> Taruskin reports criticism of Britten for his use of exoticism in *Death in Venice*, but then defends this exoticism on the grounds of its dramatic purpose (Vol. 5, p. 256). It is striking how willing he is to excuse in Britten what he might consider a grave moral sin in a Modernist or a German composer.

could have asked himself whether Britten was not "willy-nilly" transformed into a great composer by elite leaders of Britain's musical life.

Early on in his presentation, Taruskin claims (Vol. 5, p. 224) that both Britten and Carter lived in countries with a laissez-faire policy in the arts, but this claim is either the result of shoddy research or is intentionally deceptive. How could Taruskin have neglected to inform the reader that Britain was largely socialized immediately after World War II, whereas the United States was not? Unlike the situation in the United States, in the United Kingdom substantial public funding was provided for the Arts Council and the BBC, both of which played a dominant role in the cultural life of the country. This resulted in a vast expansion in festivals, orchestras, and radio broadcasts of "high culture," much of this supported by government money. Britten's music and career were primary beneficiaries of this expansion. Nothing corresponding to this government support of a single composer occurred in the United States.

Owing to the highly unreliable nature of Taruskin's claim and tactics, it is necessary to give a detailed account of the taxpayer and "elite" critical support that was necessary to establish Britten as the preeminent English composer of the twentieth century. The centerpiece of this discussion will be Paul Kildea's *Selling Britten: Music and the Market Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The data provided by Kildea allow one to quickly see through Taruskin's portrayal of Britten as a social composer who "had to overcome considerable odds to realize his potential as a musical dramatist" (Taruskin, Vol. 5, p. 227), who was too impoverished to compose an opera (note Britten's response to Serge Koussevitzky in 1942, when he was twenty-nine years old, p. 229), and who apparently received no "elite" validation until receiving a prize from the Koussevitzky Musical Foundation that allowed him to write his first opera (also on p. 229).

For example, Kildea notes on p. 57 that Britten's *Soirées musicales*, "based on music by Rossini and composed for film"... "was broadcast two months after completion, repeated four months later, and given a BBC Prom performance on 10 August 1937" when Britten was 24 years old.<sup>57</sup>

According to Britten's diary, this performance was not well received, an extraordinary reaction given the deliberately popular nature of both the piece and the presumed taste of the Prom audience. Yet the work's ultimate success was primarily due to the BBC. Between January 1937 and March 1945, *Soirées musicales* was broadcast around twenty-five times.

Thus, by the time Britten was 32 years old, a single work of his had been broadcast on radio (which was at that time the central mass broadcast medium) more often than the sum total of works of any but a few American composers of art music; one should also keep in mind that numerous works of Britten were

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<sup>57</sup> Note that Elliott Carter, a bit older than Britten, first received a Proms performance many decades later in his career.



broadcast on the BBC, not just this single piece. By American standards, this was an extraordinarily blessed composer.

Taruskin draws attention twice, in a somewhat conspiratorial tone, to the patronage of Elliott Carter from the 1950s on by Sir William Glock, controller of music at the BBC (Taruskin Vol. 5, pp. 293 and 296), but not a single time does he mention the active patronage of Britten by the BBC and William Glock not only during the same period, but throughout Britten's entire career. This patronage was maintained consistently, even after Britten returned to the United Kingdom after a three-year stay in the United States and was still under suspicion as a pacifist. For example, note the following citations from Kildea's *Selling Britten*:

[T]he post-war formation of the Third Programme (the BBC's highbrow music and arts channel), ultimately affected his [Britten's] return to prominence in BBC schedules. (p. 69)

Britten remained well represented in the schedules of the Third Programme. Amyot considered that Britten's music and the goals of the Third Programme ("to project all that is fine in contemporary art") were totally compatible. (p. 71)

When Murrill protested that the Third Programme was over-playing Britten's operas, a view shared by some other composers at the time, he earned rebuttal from a department which did not "feel this to be a real danger at present in view of the unique position of Britten in contemporary English Opera." (pp. 71-72)

In 1951 Britten complained that the Home Service did not broadcast his works, and that the omission was a deliberate policy. Murrill's response was that if a particular composer received lavish representation in the Third Programme, he or she could expect less attention from the other services. Britten's complaint suggests that he was well aware that his public profile in the late 1940s and early 1950s depended to a large extent on the BBC. (p. 72)

[T]he Third Programme reinforced Britten's reputation with specialist audience and critics alike. (p. 72)

[concerning Britten's *Serenade*] "HMV of Columbia or Decca should record this...as soon as possible and the BBC should see that the country is made aware of its new masterpiece." (cited on p. 207: William Glock in the *Observer*, 24 Oct. 1943).<sup>58</sup>

This pattern of patronage of Britten not only by the BBC but also by the Arts Council was consistent throughout his career.<sup>59</sup> For example, concerning the

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<sup>58</sup> On pp. 72-73, Kildea discusses the continued prominence of Britten on the BBC throughout his career. For example, in 1963 the BBC "broadcast approximately forty hours of his music; in the same year, Tippett's music took up just over ten." In 1969 Britten's share rose to fifty-seven hours.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, pp. 86-87, discussing the 1947 Arts Council support of the newly-founded English Opera Group. According to a letter cited on pp. 104-105, although this group's purpose was to "encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage," by 1951 the Group had given 488 performances of four operas by Britten, and had produced only one opera by any other composer.

1951 Festival of Britain, one reads that "For both the EOG [English Opera Group] and the Festival of Britain, the Britten Festival symbolized British artistic achievement" (p. 105). In explanation of reduced October attendance at the 1954 Sadler's Well's season, Kildea suggests that

[i]t was perhaps natural that audiences would eventually tire of *Lucretia*, an opera that had been presented in London approximately every two years since its composition. But the next two seasons of *The Turn of the Screw* suggest that London audiences at the time were being over-exposed to Britten's music... (pp. 113-114).

Significant "elite" validation for Britten also came from influential musicologists and theorists. In *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his works from a group of specialists*,<sup>60</sup> published shortly before Britten's fortieth birthday (!) one reads his name associated with an extraordinary range of past masters. The opening of an article by Norman del Mar casually asserts, "*Albert Herring* was composed immediately after the production of *Lucretia*, to which it stands as the *Meistersinger* does to *Tristan*" (p. 146), and a Leo Stein article on "The Symphonies" (pp. 245-256) compares Britten's work to Haydn's, as though he considered their equal level of mastery a self-evident proposition. Hans Keller's article, "The Musical Character" (pp. 319-351) goes even further in its homage to the young master. The first section is entitled, "The Extra-Historical Aspect: Britten and Mozart," and is replete with observations such as the following:

Ease, facility, effortless skills—these points are obvious in the case of either composer. (p. 324).

Thus considered, Mozart and Britten might be called 'revolutionary conservative', Schoenberg and Beethoven 'conservative revolutionaries'. (p. 342)

In discussing the "hype" methods of marketing recordings of Britten's works, Kildea speaks of "Britten as 1960s pop star and cultural icon, with each new hit superseding its predecessor" (p. 229).

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See also p. 153, summarizing the Arts Council's support of Britten's Aldeburgh Festival and p. 174, discussing the increased government funding in the 1960s under the Labour government.

<sup>60</sup> Eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1952). On p. 3 of an article by the Earl of Harewood (George Henry Hubert Lascelles, 7th Earl of Harewood) entitled, "The Man," we read the following about Britten: "When he left the College, the most lucrative alternative to work as a teacher or accompanist seemed to lie in the films, and Britten joined a company specializing in documentaries." This appears to contradict directly Taruskin's portrayal of Britten's impoverished early career, with the composer "forced...into the movie industry" (Vol. 5, p. 227). Although Britten undoubtedly faced great difficulties during this period owing to the death of his parents, numerous other composers faced similar or greater difficulties and received far fewer professional opportunities.

Thus, Taruskin's entire presentation of Britten is flawed to the point of fraudulence.<sup>61</sup> This does not mean that Britten was not gifted and accomplished; it is doubtful, though, that his abilities so far surpassed all other British composers that these composers were not deserving of a greater hearing and far greater state support.<sup>62</sup> If Taruskin were looking for confirmation of his thesis that renowned composers' reputations result from "prestige machines," created and maintained by "elite" support—i.e., that the music of "great composers" has no significant intrinsic value, but rather that a high value is projected onto it by a culture supposedly duped by a conspiracy of critical support—he could not have found a more perfect example of this process than the marketing of the name and music of Benjamin Britten.

In the case of Britten, Taruskin seems truly to believe in the hype of the "prestige machine."<sup>63</sup> In his discussion of Britten's music, which predictably focuses on his operas, Taruskin has turned from sharp critic into uncritical fan. He does report the assessment of James Fenton that the ending of *Peter Grimes* is inadvertently immoral, in that "it seeks...to justify an irredeemable criminal," but Taruskin leaps to Britten's defense with, "Nevertheless 'the ending is dramatically memorable,' Garbutt wrote. Few have disagreed." (Taruskin, Vol. 5, p. 243). The reader is not allowed to see the opinions of those "few." Joseph Kerman is next enlisted to ratify the praise. There are no voices in this chapter that question the aesthetic coherence, brilliance, and success of Britten's music; it is simply treated as a given.

At first it appears that Taruskin believes that the fact that the ending is "dramatically memorable" (p. 243) releases Britten from responsibility for a

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<sup>61</sup> Even Taruskin's basic conceit that Britten was a "social" composer, as opposed to the "asocial" Carter, must be qualified. On pp. 229-231, Kildea speculates on the causes for the growing intimacy (and for some, coldness) of Britten's music in the 1960s. He cites Lord Harewood, a friend of Britten, who believed that Britten felt that the "easy success" of his *War Requiem* "was an outrage and an invasion of privacy." Concerning the public failure of his earlier work *Gloriana*, Harewood believed that this was "a turning point for Ben. It shut him in on himself and he became even more private. He had made a great public gesture and the public had, so to speak, rejected him. He had risked writing for other than 'his' audience..." (p. 229). Although Kildea cites other evidence for the change in Britten's later music, it is striking to speculate what conspiratorial hay Taruskin would make of Harewood's comment had it come from the pen of a member of Brahms's or Schoenberg's circle of admirers. The problem yet again is that Taruskin's sociological model cannot make sense of smaller groupings within a large, complex society. The small groups of musicians with whom Britten consistently worked and the small public circles for whom he preferred to write were exclusive. If Taruskin were consistent in his egalitarianism, this exclusivity on Britten's part should have triggered a torrent of furtive insinuations.

<sup>62</sup> One thinks, for example, of a composer such as Michael Tippett, who did not fit as neatly into the "composer-publisher-broadcaster-triumvirate" (Kildea, p. 62) as did Britten.

<sup>63</sup> There is plentiful evidence that a substantial portion of the populace of England interested in music considered Britten's music to be nearly incomprehensible, and that numerous music lovers resented the powerful prestige machine that relentlessly promoted his music. Taruskin has omitted this evidence, perhaps because it would convict Britten of the "asocial composer indifferent to audience needs" charge he consistently hurls at avant-gardists.

possibly "immoral" decision that in a German composer Taruskin might consider borderline criminal. Taruskin makes another attempt to confront the ethics of the closing scene, then finally explains that the drama is an allegory of the position of homosexuals in mid-century British society (pp. 246-248), after which he bustles us on to another topic. Apparently the drama was not at all about a character named Peter Grimes, but rather about Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten—did not Taruskin in other circumstances consider this tactic a species of the biographical fallacy?—and all the other homosexuals in society. Was this truly what "the music meant" in its own context, or is it not rather what Taruskin thinks it *really* means?

Taruskin appears not to notice that he never responded to James Fenton's challenge (p. 243). That humane interpretations of this opera are possible is not in doubt; the intentions of the opera are self-evidently humane. But if Taruskin were fair-minded, he might have asked other questions: how might the parents of a child abused or murdered by someone resembling Peter Grimes react to Britten's sympathetic treatment of the character? Is it not possible that the efforts of Britten and his collaborator Montagu Slater to exonerate Grimes (in comparison to the treatment of Grimes in the original poem by George Crabbe) and their conventionalization of the town members (i.e., portraying them as moralistic but hypocritical, a stock-in-trade of mid-century left-liberal literature and films) made it a bit too easy to sympathize with a single oppressed individual? Taruskin emphasizes throughout his epic that artworks should be challenged in this manner, but his failure to do so in the case of Britten's opera is conspicuous.

In contrast, note that Taruskin likens attempts to defend the problematic (yet dramatically memorable) closing chorus of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* to a disease: "[T]he anxieties surrounding Wagner have played a key role in inspiring the 'estheticism' that ...continues to *infect* [added emphasis] discussions of art even now (Vol. 3, p. 561).

Toward the end of this chapter, Taruskin discusses Britten's 1964 lecture upon receiving an award from the Aspen Institute for the Humanities. In it, Britten speaks of "snobs who demand the latest *avant-garde* tricks," etc., and insists, "These people are dangerous." (Vol. 5, pp. 258-259).<sup>64</sup> Taruskin is full of praise for such words. He writes, "To those who saw themselves as living only in history, who treated their social peers as a hindrance, and who therefore continued to invest their art with an outdated aristocratic (or 'high-culture') aura of inaccessibility, Britten offered a prim pointer on manners: 'it is insulting to address anyone in a language which they do not understand.'" (p. 259). Thus, one of the leading cultural figures in Britain, the humanist Benjamin Britten, in the midst of the Cold War and with McCarthyism and red scares a present peril, exhibited a distinct lack of solidarity with other members of his profession by calling them "dangerous." His grounds were simple: he did not agree with their views about art. Taruskin

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<sup>64</sup> This is not the only example of unpleasant judgments on Britten's part. Despite the overwhelming support for his music on the part of critics throughout most of his career, Britten spoke about them sharply; see, for example, Kildea, p. 131, where Britten dismisses critics as "vermin."

immediately leaps in to second this attempt to restrict the range in which composers can safely practice their profession, treating his own reactionary attitude as the path forward into the future.<sup>65</sup> Composers who desired to follow their expressive visions should be considered relics of an aristocratic (= "high") culture. Yet who was a central British representative of high culture at that moment? The man giving the honorary speech at an elite institution dedicated to high culture: Benjamin Britten.

#### **D. Case Study Three: Elliott Carter**

In the chapter devoted to Elliott Carter (Vol. 5, pp. 261-306), Taruskin the acerbic critic returns to the scene. An odd stratagem is employed to start it off: we receive a summary of Stravinsky's criticism from 1964 of Britten's *War Requiem*, then move straight to Stravinsky's praise of Carter's *Double Concerto*. This is not only an elegant narrative device; it also represents one of the main rhetorical tactics Taruskin uses for the rest of the book. Criticism by Britten's contemporaries of the quality of his music is sealed off from the Britten chapter, but is highlighted in the chapter dedicated to the Modernists. The intent here is to give the impression that only Modernists criticized the quality of Britten's music, and that is because they were Modernists (i.e., supporters of "aristocratic," elitist values such as complexity). This sets up the situation we meet with numbing frequency over the last several hundred pages: a favored composer of Taruskin's, part of the "wave of the future" (i.e., the return to tonality), is showered with unstinting praise, counterpointed by elitist, "backward" Modernists growling in the corner.

All of these shadings are necessary for Taruskin to achieve his main goal in these pivotal chapters, which is to create a counter-reality in which the music of Britten (representing tonal "social" composers) is essentially expressive because it was written to meet its audience's needs, whereas the music of Carter (representing post-tonal "asocial" composers) only *seems* expressive because it was written out of private needs. In Taruskin's counter-reality, Modernists are cast as modern-day elitists/aristocrats, as opposed to the commoner "social" composers; all one need do to believe in this myth is ignore the fact that during the period under discussion, "social" composers such as Britten and Dimitri Shostakovich were, in terms of prestige and pervasive influence, elite composers of their respective countries. In

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<sup>65</sup> Taruskin's assault on the principles of logic is relentless. Note that he has just criticized avant-gardists for their "outdated" stance of "living only in history" (itself a demonstrably false assertion when universally applied to avant-garde composers). Given that in 1964 serialism was still at its high tide, the grounds for Taruskin's claim can scarcely be empirical; thus, one must assume that Taruskin is using a Hegelian-style progressivist historicist rationale—i.e., based on the unfolding of reason in history—in order to quasi-logically "prove" that avant-garde progressivist historicism was "outdated." Such a judgment obviously can be made only at the risk of self-contradiction. Note as well that although Taruskin claims that Modernists treated their "social peers as a hindrance," in the passages cited, Britten treats some of his compositional peers as a hindrance to his own "social" views on art, and treats all but one of his compositional peers dismissively.

Taruskin's imaginary world, all Modernists value complexity, so they will always value complicated pieces over simple ones; they are infected by German ideals of absolute music, so they will always search out these "alien" values.<sup>66</sup> If one concedes these points, then Taruskin's counter-reality can have free reign. And he has very cleverly chosen his target, as most Formalist rationales, which have served as a central line of defense of non-generic new music in the post-World War II period, emphasized that all talk of musical meaning was pointless outside the theoretical system one was employing, and in general banished all discussion of musical expression.<sup>67</sup> Britten's long-term connection to the public makes his music appear meaningful on an empirical level (although what precisely it has meant is unclear, as Taruskin's resort to hidden meanings in *Peter Grimes* makes clear, and its meaning to listeners now is not identical to what it was a generation ago), whereas the meaningfulness of Carter's music on any level beyond the structural can, if one employs a purely Formalist rationale, very likely never be demonstrated.

However, there are at least three routes for escaping Taruskin's counter-reality. The first is pluralist: the aims of Carter's First String Quartet are different from those of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Those who favor Carter's music tend to admire his intentions and find his music both aesthetically and emotionally satisfying, just as those who favor Britten's music feel about his intentions and music. Each composer's music perhaps speaks most powerfully to different groups of listeners; why would one want to collapse these different publics and their attendant support structures into an indifferent mass?<sup>68</sup>

The second is empirical: Taruskin essentializes Modernism and its values to such a degree that his claims are easily disprovable. If valuing complexity over simplicity is a necessary condition of being a Modernist, then the densest work will always win. But it doesn't. Complexity is one quality among many that Modernists value; many prefer the stripped-down language of Morton Feldman or the allusive/elusive music of György Kurtág to the complexity of Elliott Carter or Brian Ferneyhough. Modernists do not inevitably seek out the "alien" values of absolute music; many favor theatrical or mixed media works.<sup>69</sup> And when one

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<sup>66</sup> Taruskin employs this tactic so frequently that by the end of his epic it has become an unintentionally comic tic: the dastardly Modernists enter wearing the dark cape of European culture and spreading the ills of high compositional standards, craftsmanship, innovation, complexity, musical literacy, or any other bogeyman that Taruskin can scare up.

<sup>67</sup> For an illuminating four-phase model of Modernism, of which Formalism is the last phase, see Art Berman, *Preface to Modernism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 1-88, and especially 68-88 for his discussion of Formalism. Berman treats Formalism as a sort of dead-end of Modernism; unfortunately, he has not taken account of new artistic currents that have arisen over the last generation that have left Formalism behind.

<sup>68</sup> It is unfortunate that Taruskin does not value pluralism more highly; in a complex society, not every composer need write for the same audience, and not every composer can write effectively for a mass public. Carter's music has found its own audience and generated a loyal following over a period of decades.

<sup>69</sup> Taruskin treats the late-Modernist phase of Formalism, of which the bulk of Milton Babbitt's music might be considered paradigmatic, as representative of the whole of Modernism. However,

considers that the supposedly alien values of absolute music Taruskin repeatedly excoriates have been deeply ingrained in American musical culture for well over 150 years, they can scarcely be considered alien; in fact, these sorts of charges appear xenophobic.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, Modernism as a whole is not reducible to its late-Formalist manifestations. Although Carter was friendly with Milton Babbitt and his circle, and although there are many areas of overlap between his musical vocabulary (although not its syntax or formal organization) and theirs, Carter was not a Formalist, and in practically all of his major pieces adhered to the expressionist aims of earlier phases of Modernism (in Berman's terms, "midmodernism" and "abstraction"<sup>71</sup>). On pp. 301-305 of Vol. 5, the disconnect between Carter's expressive intentions and those of a younger generation of Formalists such as Benjamin Boretz is clear. However, throughout this passage Taruskin strenuously attempts to minimize and undermine Carter's expressive intentions, or to condemn them to irrelevance owing to the "complicated" nature of his musical language; the latter is clearly a subjective opinion that Taruskin attempts to convert into an objective music-historical judgement.<sup>72</sup> As was the case with Tchaikovsky, Taruskin's simplistic dichotomy requires that he distort, hide, and misrepresent evidence: Carter's works must be tossed into the Formalist camp and judged as such, no matter how much evidence contradicts this assessment and how strenuously the composer might object.

The third is both logical and historical. Taruskin structures the last volume of his *History* around an elitist-aristocratic/populist dichotomy, with the Modernists being the heirs to "outmoded" elitist-aristocratic values and tonal composers the

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theatrical and mixed-media works have been an important component of leading Modernist composers' output throughout the entire twentieth century.

<sup>70</sup> For example, for a survey of the two-century-long reception history of Beethoven's music in the United States, see Michael Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011). Beethoven's music exercised a strong influence on Transcendentalists such as Margaret Fuller, and the entire Transcendentalist movement is unthinkable without the influence of the philosophers and poets of the German Enlightenment.

<sup>71</sup> Berman, op. cit., pp. 37-53.

<sup>72</sup> On p. 304 Taruskin writes, interposing numerous rhetorical qualifications, "[Carter] has *occasionally* [added emphasis] argued, *apparently against the conventional wisdom* [added emphasis], that *for all its surface complications and its formidable intellectual rigor* [added emphasis], his music has always been at bottom an expression...of American ideals." This sentence is a masterpiece of shady rhetoric. In fact, Carter *consistently* explained and defended his expressive intentions; why else, for instance, would he have written an article validating the theme of "Expressionism and American Music" (*Perspectives of New Music* 4/1 [Fall-Winter 1965], pp. 1-13)? The "conventional wisdom" Taruskin intends is clearly that of "elitists" such as Benjamin Boretz, but this was not the actual conventional wisdom of the period under question (the 1960s); this period was dominated by tonal music, whereas extreme Formalism was accepted only in relatively small academic circles. Taruskin claims that Carter's musical language is reducible to "surface complications," but he has here committed the logical fallacy of begging the question, having assumed what he needs to prove. And his implied claim that "formidable intellectual rigor" is incompatible with "American ideals" is an insult to the entire American intellectual tradition.

heroes of our present-day egalitarian culture. Apparently Taruskin has changed his mind drastically about the status of aristocratic values. In his discussion of Tchaikovsky's ballets in Vol. 4 (pp. 140-144), Taruskin emphasizes that "it was membership in what could justly be regarded as the last surviving eighteenth-century (hierarchical, aristocratic) society in Europe that shaped Chaikovsky's creative attitudes" (p. 142) and discusses approvingly Tchaikovsky's focus on "the 'tasty,' or sensuously delectable"; this is certainly an aesthetic value that few in late Imperial Russia had the luxury to cultivate.<sup>73</sup> Taruskin also consistently attempts to cast Tchaikovsky as a social composer, in that he worked assiduously to satisfy the tastes of his aristocratic patrons and largely aristocratic audiences. Thus, a nineteenth-century Russian composer who focuses on satisfying aristocratic tastes qualifies as a "social" composer; however, in Vol. 5 a "social" composer must be a populist composer, and elitist-aristocratic values are suddenly "asocial" and to be abhorred.<sup>74</sup>

It should be self-evident that the aesthetic values of artistic Modernists such as Carter are not the aristocratic values described in Taruskin's presentations of Tchaikovsky's music. One could make the case that Carter's values are close to the Brahms–Schoenberg–Berg tradition, which Taruskin in Vol. 5 would consider aristocratic-elitist, given the "outdated aristocratic (or 'high-culture') aura of inaccessibility" he attributes to such music (p. 259). However, none of these latter composers worked primarily in an aristocratic *milieu*. What is more, Brahms was composing at the same time as Tchaikovsky, which means that apparently there were two contradictory sets of "aristocratic-elite" compositional values in the late nineteenth century, one set beneficial and "social" (i.e., that found in an aristocratic milieu) and one harmful and "asocial" (i.e., that found in a non-aristocratic milieu). Or perhaps the aristocratic values suddenly became "asocial" with the fall of the Romanov dynasty in Russia, but the grounds for such a transformation are obscure.

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<sup>73</sup> Both aspects are more thoroughly discussed in "Chaikovsky and the Human," *op. cit.*, where Taruskin claims that Tchaikovsky "was the preeminent aristocratic musician of the nineteenth century" (p. 276). In this passage, Taruskin verges on open support for the authoritarian political system of late Imperial Russia, claiming that Tchaikovsky's political views, which included brutal reactionary stances (see, for example, p. 280), were "the politics of affirmation rather than the kind of politics we have been conditioned by the artistic discourse of late, late romanticism to regard as politics, namely the politics of alienation, contention, and resistance. The politics of aristocracy is as much a politics as any other..." Thus, according to Taruskin, the long battle our society has fought and is still fighting for achievements such as fair labor laws, equal rights for all citizens, and humane treatment of the poor is attributable to "late, late romanticism" and is to be condemned as "resentful" and "alienating." Instead, one assumes, we should all bask in the "affirming" politics of the elite strata of our society.

<sup>74</sup> In the discussion of Carter's music, Taruskin treats elitism as the "asocial" pole opposed to the populist/"social" pole; on p. 259 of Vol. 5, p. 259, toward the close of the presentation on Britten, Taruskin opposes "outdated" aristocratic values of avant-gardism to Britten's populist/"social" stance. Taruskin uses "aristocratic" and "elite" so interchangeably that one must assume he is treating them as close synonyms.



Whatever one might conclude from this conceptual jumble, none of it would determine Carter's artistic values, which were not identical to his predecessors': origin is not identical to essence. And although Carter came from a wealthy family, there is little evidence that his music appealed during his lifetime primarily to aristocratic or wealthy audiences, and plentiful evidence that his largest audience consisted of those who were not aristocrats and were not particularly wealthy. Carter's music was indeed defended by "elite" musicians (one assumes Taruskin intends by this term highly literate and refined musicians such as Charles Rosen or Pierre Boulez), but so was Britten's.

It appears that for Taruskin, the primary factor that makes Carter's music "elite" and "aristocratic" has next to nothing to do with the traditional meanings of these terms, but instead involves Carter's decision when he was in his early forties to finally write the kind of music he wanted to write instead of continuing to write in a more anonymous "accessible" style. For most admirers of Carter's music, this was when he first truly came into his own as a composer, and many view his decision as admirable and courageous. Taruskin very likely considers this decision the beginning of the end.

Taruskin kicks off his discussion of Carter's early works by emphasizing his elite background, in contrast to Britten's relative poverty and social commitment: "The son of a wealthy lace importer, he never had to earn a living from his musical activity and was not particularly ambitious in his youth" (Vol. 5, p. 268). It is striking how Taruskin has forgotten to mention Carter's intense study of Classic and Modern languages and literature, his early study of composition with Charles Ives, his concentration on literature and music at Harvard, his success as a composer of choral music, his editorship of *Modern Music*, and his efforts at organizing concerts and supporting the efforts of other American composers.

Taruskin reinforces the impression of the elitist Carter by citing his criticism of the early Darmstadt school, prefaced by, "Carter is very critical of the work of many if not most of his contemporaries" (p. 277). Carter was indeed critical of the music of the Darmstadt school—but so was Britten (who considered its composers "dangerous"), as were most Classical musicians who knew anything about it. But as a general judgment of Carter's attitudes, this judgment is difficult to defend. Again, Taruskin appears to be intentionally ignoring evidence. Surely he could have taken the trouble to look more closely into a book such as *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995*,<sup>75</sup> which is full of generous praise for both older composers and immediate colleagues; the more recent *Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents*<sup>76</sup> documents his efforts in support of composers in difficult straights such as Conlon Nancarrow (Meyer and Schreffler, pp. 98-101) and numerous other neglected composers (see, for example, pp. 184-185). Carter was widely reputed to have an encyclopedic knowledge of

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<sup>75</sup> Ed. Jonathan W. Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997); this is cited in Taruskin's bibliography, but he appears not to have looked into its contents in detail.

<sup>76</sup> Eds. Felix Meyer and Anne C. Shreffler (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press: 2008).

modern music, which meant that he knew the work of his contemporaries extremely well; if he criticized other composers, he at least did this on the basis of thorough knowledge of their music. One finds in Carter's writings a striking lack of the sort of widespread condemnation of other composers that one finds, for instance, in Britten's 1964 Aspen address. Apparently Taruskin, while writing p. 277 of the last volume of his epic, forgot that on p. 259 he had emphasized that Britten could find only three other composers, and only one living (Dmitri Shostakovich), worthy of praise by name.<sup>77</sup>

An extremely subtle yet revealing example of rhetorical shading can be seen in a comparison of Taruskin's description of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, in which the prose turns nearly purple: "calamitous climax," "crashing back precipitously," "a sinister tritone," "most horrible of all," "appalling perception," etc. (p. 238), with Taruskin's description of Carter's First String Quartet: "One of the things that made the Quartet seem both grand and richly expressive was its deployment of large, dramatic gestures" (p. 289). Note that Carter's dramatic gestures only *seem* expressive, whereas Britten's gestures, in a fine example of essentialism, *are* expressive.

Taruskin also begins hinting that perhaps the complexity in Carter's music is mere density, without clear aural order or significance. He never says this outright, but instead selectively employs the words of others, usually immediately after the premiere performance of a work, to raise doubts about the quality of Carter's music. He does not quote those who could hear, or at least intuit, clear harmonic order in Carter's music, or quote those who decades later came to understand what had at first sounded confusing, for obvious reasons: it would weaken the case for his belief that "Carter had *willy-nilly* [added emphasis] become the chief standard bearer for the traditional modernist view of art and its autonomous history" (p. 301). For instance, he notes that in 1963 Stravinsky, who praised Carter's Double Concerto (1961) in the highest terms, "confessed himself unable to understand the all but peerlessly patterned, detail-heavy music except in the broadest 'gestural' terms"; Taruskin uses this opportunity to claim that "its very inscrutability magnified the Concerto's appeal" (p. 265). Other supporters of Carter's music found the work mysterious but not inscrutable, and nearly five

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<sup>77</sup> It is astonishing that Britten, in his Aspen lecture (discussed in Vol. 5, p. 259) could have neglected to mention Samuel Barber, surely one of the greatest tonal composers of the twentieth century (was this owing to professional rivalry?), or any number of light classical or popular composers, or an outstanding jazz composer such as Duke Ellington (was this owing to professional snobbery?). Taruskin implies that Britten's failure to mention more than one living composer is the result of a paucity of composers attempting to write "for the people," but this claim ignores the fact that hundreds of composers were at that moment trying their best to meet audience needs, and many were succeeding at this task far better than Britten, and with far less elite critical and state financial support. Duke Ellington, for example, maintained over a period of decades perhaps the most accomplished large jazz ensemble ever seen, and did this without state support. His music reached an audience much larger and sociologically broader than Britten's ever did. How could Taruskin have neglected to chastise Britten for ignoring a fellow composer who far out-paced Britten in reaching ordinary people?

decades later, the harmonic and rhythmic organization of this work sound quite clear for anyone who has developed the necessary aural and analytical skills.

Taruskin briefly discusses a passage in the Double Concerto in which Carter's notation, allowing the coordination of "simultaneously steady, accelerating, and retarding tempi, actually disguises the central fact that the wind instruments play at a steady rate. The score, in other words, looks altogether different from how the music is meant to sound...Britten would have spoken here of snobbery" (pp. 264-265). Taruskin must have been nodding off when he wrote this passage, as the winds are indeed the "steady" stratum he has just alluded to. The notation is not disguising anything (is notation only allowed to indicate steady rhythms?), but instead is facilitating the coordination of the steady stratum with the other strata, just as Taruskin described it. In other words, the score allows the music to sound the way that Carter intended it to, which is what most musicians believe a score should do. Many listeners have found this section especially thrilling in live performance. Taruskin not only trips over his own thoughts in his attempt to invalidate Carter's music, he puts his own judgment on this music in the mouth of a long-dead composer—that is, someone who is not able to protest this sort of ventriloquism.

On p. 296, Taruskin cites the doubts of Carter's British supporter William Glock in 1954 that the harmonies of the First String Quartet (1951) will ever "prove to be right and convincing after many hearings"; the harmonies sounded convincing to others at the time and sound even more convincing now, with sixty years' distance. William Glock, a highly cultured and intelligent musician, supported Carter's music over a period of decades because he found his works musically convincing, not because he found them incomprehensible and was drugged by the evil ideology of Modernism.

Taruskin quotes Andrew Porter's fulsome praise in 1974 of Carter's Third Quartet (1973),<sup>78</sup> but also notes that Porter remarked that many details pass by uncomprehended, and that a listener "will probably never know exactly how precise any particular performance is" (p. 301). Taruskin then leaps to the conclusion that Modernist critics suspended personal judgment in favor of "trust in the composer" (i.e., a "late, late Romantic"/elitist/aristocratic/Modernist habit), "even where there can be no sensory or rational corroboration" of the value of the work. He goes on to speak about the similarity of this ideology to that of religious thought, in which "faith is accompanied, indeed generated, by bafflement" (p. 301). Unfortunately, Taruskin seems to be the one baffled here, as he perhaps lacks the aural skills possessed by numerous others who can perceive the details of Carter's Third Quartet quite clearly, and who can distinguish well between a good and a bad performance. Are Taruskin's musical skills so weak that he cannot tell that the main materials in this quartet are clearly distinguished by contrasting textures—usually

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<sup>78</sup> Andrew Porter was one of Carter's strongest critical supporters. In light of the fact that he was not primarily an *academic*—one of Taruskin's favored targets—Taruskin was apparently reduced to portraying him as mindlessly addicted to Modernism.

demarcated by rests and/or clear changes in texture—and by different intervals? Is he really not able to distinguish by ear intervals such as perfect fourths, major thirds, and minor sevenths? Note that Taruskin leaps from a loosely-phrased guess by a critic responding to initial performances of a piece to a claim that there can be no sensory or rational corroboration for performances of the music at all, a statement that is demonstrably false. Again, Taruskin's impulses to form broad conclusions outrun his ability to construct a rigorous and coherent chain of reasoning.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, Taruskin draws upon a 1977 review by Porter of Carter's *Symphony for Three Orchestras* (1976) for the following statements, which seem to present a damning portrait of the process of validation of Carter's music: "Porter allowed that 'at fourth and fifth hearing, much of the detail still remained elusive'" (this is an exact citation from Porter's article); "As far as he [i.e., Porter] was concerned, the pitch organization was meaningless" (this is Taruskin's unreliable paraphrase of Porter's intent); "Yet even so he did not hesitate to pronounce the ultimate accolade: another masterpiece" (p. 301). Surely Taruskin cannot actually believe that a musician of Porter's acuity found the pitch organization of the entire work literally meaningless, yet was so bewitched by the mythology of genius that he would proclaim a work he found nonsensical to be a masterpiece. Surely Taruskin is able to aurally distinguish to some degree Carter's use of harmonic coloration to distinguish the various ensembles and can aurally note the more obvious cases of Carter's expressive use of harmony, such as the open-fifth sonorities that dominate the pitched-percussion sections (in Orchestra II). If he is unable to perceive the latter, then perhaps it is time for him to choose another profession than music; if he can perceive at least this much, then he cannot maintain that the pitch organization is completely meaningless. Again, more than three decades later, much of the pitch organization in this piece is reasonably clear to anyone who has developed decent aural skills for post-tonal music.

Taruskin's audience-response aesthetic requires that a lack of skills in "the listener" result in a condemnation of a difficult piece as incomprehensible and its composer as incompetent. Anyone who teaches first-year undergraduates on a regular basis and knows the habits of the least studious among them can easily recognize the perils of advocating this method. Taruskin also does not allow for improvement in training methods for performance and perception, or for the gradual assimilation, by a community of listeners over an extended period of time, of even the most seemingly incomprehensible music.

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<sup>79</sup> Taruskin is also factually challenged; on p. 300 he writes, "but Carter had indeed made great efforts to avoid the harmonic fortuity that governed the world of total serialism even if the listening ear was thwarted by the sheer density of detail from discovering the algorithms that were in operation." Taruskin's assertion concerning the harmonic fortuity of total serialism is clearly rendered unreliable when one takes into account a work such as Lev Koblyakov's aurally-based analysis of Boulez's music (see *A World of Harmony* [Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990]). As for the second part of Taruskin's statement, he is apparently unaware that Elliott Carter was not an algorithmic composer. Thus, there are no algorithms to be discovered.

Taruskin might object that he is attempting to describe "what it meant" when each piece was written, not "what it means" in some transcendental sense (although, as we have seen, he changes his mind when his favored composers are concerned). However, the fact that numerous highly-regarded works of contemporary music received angry and baffled reception when they were written is of trivial significance for cultural history if one leaves it at that. "What it meant" must also include how it was perceived years or even decades later. An analysis of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that ignored its entire reception history after the first year of its existence would be of only antiquarian interest. It is a fact that each of the works of Carter's mentioned in Taruskin's chapter gained a more sympathetic hearing with time; some of his most difficult orchestral works, such as his Concerto for Orchestra, received tumultuous ovations decades after they were composed in countries such as Britain, where audiences are exposed to a far wider range of contemporary music than their American counterparts.<sup>80</sup>

In his attempt to portray the validation of Carter as a quasi-mechanical manifestation of a sort of prestige racket,<sup>81</sup> Taruskin goes so far as to claim that,

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<sup>80</sup> Taruskin has conveniently neglected to discuss the powerful reaction that the *Adagio tenebroso* from Carter's late *Symphonia* has received from its first performance at the London Proms on; admitting evidence that might weaken his narrative thread is apparently anathema to Taruskin. One imagines that he must be flummoxed by more recent newspaper articles describing the eager reception of new Carter works in Britain, had he chosen to read them; see, for example, "Elliott Carter packs out the Proms" (Tom Service on the Classical Blog, *The Guardian*, Aug. 1, 2008).

One sees similar tactics used throughout Vol. 5. For example, on pp. 113-15, Taruskin describes the public failure in 1962 of the first performance of Aaron Copland's twelve-tone orchestral work *Connotations*, which was attended by Jackie Kennedy and nationally televised, as follows:

The ending was a series of strident "aggregates"...that the audience found perplexing, if not downright distasteful. The immediate reaction was embarrassing...The dramatic fashion in which Copland had sacrificed his hard-won well-nigh unique public appeal for the sake of what seemed...an 'alienated' modernist stance...

The subtext for Taruskin's narration of this event is very likely Britten's Aspen speech (p. 259, which Taruskin emphasizes in another context as well): "it is insulting to address anyone in a language which they do not understand."

However, it would probably spoil Taruskin's point to include a review of the performance a decade later: "'62 Copland Piece Gets Cheers This Time" (Harold C. Schonberg, *The New York Times*, Dec. 22, 1973); or of a 1987 performance: "*Connotations* holds up very well indeed—a genuinely powerful piece..." (John Rockwell, cited in *Copland: Since 1943*, by Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989], p. 342).

One might also note that Copland demonstrably did not "sacrifice" his public appeal, as his music continued to be widely performed and admired long after that concert. I can attest—and can countless other orchestral musicians my age—that throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s, Copland's works were consistently performed in orchestral concerts. Taruskin's portrayal here is plainly deceptive.

<sup>81</sup> On p. 301, Taruskin writes, "Critics...began describing his stature, and his achievement, in reckless terms...Andrew Porter [in 1973]...dubbed Carter 'internationally...America's most famous

"The conclusion is inescapable" [which it is not] "that to Porter, and many other critics, Carter's masterpieces...existed purely 'ontologically,' by virtue of their perceived complexity, whether or not anyone actually experienced them. Musical value had received its most purely asocial definition." (p. 301). This is surely a mendacious interpretation of Porter's writings, taking a few statements out of context and weaving them illegitimately into a pseudo-logical conclusion. Earlier on the same page, Taruskin had cited Porter's claim that the Third Quartet was "passionate, lyrical, and profoundly exciting" and Bayan Northcott's claim that "at best his music sustains an energy of invention that is unrivalled..." Are "passion," "lyricism," "excitement," and "energy of invention" purely ontological, or do they not in fact require a human subject listening and responding to the piece? As usual, Taruskin's grand conclusions crumble upon being subjected to logical scrutiny.<sup>82</sup>

It is striking how differently Taruskin treats the critical support for Britten. Britten's *Billy Budd* was preceded by buildup so great that one critic (Steven Williams in the *Evening News*) reacted as follows:

One always resents having it dinned into one's ears that a new work is a masterpiece before it has been performed; and Benjamin Britten's 'Billy Budd' was trumpeted into the arena by such a deafening roar of advance publicity that many

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living composer' at a time when Aaron Copland and John Cage, to name only two, were still productive." Porter's statement, although inaccurate, is not "reckless" if one considers it in light of what was very likely his intent: the most famous among progressively-oriented composers dedicated to traditional concert music (which would exclude Cage). In 1979, Copland wrote a much-cited recommendation of similar tenor in nominating Carter for a significant "elite" award (the National Institute of Arts and Letters for Eminence in Music). In light of the fact that Copland had earlier demonstrated ambivalence about Carter's music, omitting him from his books on American music, is it far-fetched to assume that Carter had in fact by the late 1970's—precisely when Taruskin portrays Modernism as crumbling—reached a level of artistic accomplishment so extraordinary that it would convince not only supportive critics and avant-garde European composers, but also conservatively-oriented composers such as Copland?

<sup>82</sup> Two further points need to be stressed. First, by the 1960's critics had two decades' worth of experience with works by Carter that exhibited exceptional standards of craftsmanship and had sustained their interest over time. Thus, if these critics could not understand every detail of a new work of his, they trusted that with time the sense would be revealed. Second, musicians of the highest caliber, including fine critical thinkers such as Charles Rosen, advocated his music over a period of decades. Few of these wrote detailed accounts of their experiences learning and performing the music; instead, most praised it in a broader "masterpiece" vocabulary that was common at the time. This leads Taruskin to the incorrect generalization that "Carter's masterpieces...existed purely 'ontologically.'" Here Taruskin should exhibit more trust and more good sense. Is it credible to believe that musicians of the caliber of Rosen, Ralph Kirkpatrick, Pierre Boulez, Daniel Barenboim, James Levine, and so on, were befuddled by the complexity of Carter's scores, deluded by a masterpiece ideology into mindlessly praising them, and could not perceive any of the musical relationships of the pieces they were learning and performing?

Taruskin's claim concerning the ontological status of modern music might have been more defensible had he applied it to Babbitt (but not Martino), or even possibly Cage (but not Morton Feldman). However, Taruskin's ideology requires that any value non-tonal music possesses be ontological rather than expressive.

of us entered Covent Garden...with a mean, sneaking hope that we might be able to flesh our fangs in it.

Kildea then goes on to note, "That Williams retracted his fangs and labeled *Budd* a 'masterpiece' in no way compromises that fact that the opera did receive an enormous amount of advance publicity."<sup>83</sup> When Carter's few supportive critics proclaimed his works to be "masterpieces" after having studied the scores and heard the pieces, they were, in Taruskin's view, making "ontological" claims, i.e., that these were masterpieces "whether or not anyone experienced them" (Taruskin, Vol. 5, p. 301). But a broad range of British critics routinely proclaimed Britten's works to be masterpieces, sometimes before they had even heard them; one supposes that Taruskin would lay this down to their sound critical judgment.

Carter's works are undoubtedly complex, but the claims of incomprehensibility that his music has often received usually equivocate about the meaning of "comprehensible." The central perceptual problem here is that some details in a work of any complexity will not be discretely perceptible, even though the most important materials and the dramatic shape are clear and comprehensible; this is as true in a work of Wagner's or Richard Strauss' as in a work of Carter's. Thus, Taruskin has wasted a page of print pursuing a red herring. The significant perceptual question is not whether everything in a piece is aurally and rationally perceptible; if this were the test, all but a few audience members would fail even the "Mozart test," not to speak of the "Brahms test." Carter was clearly successful in shaping materials and musical forms such that their dramatic flow is perceptible without requiring rational perception of every detail; even Fred Lerdahl, whose theories Taruskin portrays on p. 448 as invalidating Carter's music, concedes this.<sup>84</sup> This level is more important than detailed pitch perception for understanding the overall dramatic shape of Carter's pieces. Regarding pitch perception, the question is whether enough of the underlying harmonic organization and the characterizing intervals and chords are distinctly enough projected that a listener with at least minimal training in post-tonal materials can distinguish the most significant of these materials and sense an underlying order. With Carter's music, this is undoubtedly true in the view of numerous listeners, and, not unsurprisingly, it is more likely to be believed true in those places where a great deal of post-tonal music is regularly performed and where musicians receive adequate training in post-tonal harmony.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Kildea, p. 130.

<sup>84</sup> Fred Lerdahl, "On Carter's Influence," in Marc Ponthus and Susan Tang, eds., *Elliott Carter: A Centennial Celebration* (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2008), pp. 15-22.

<sup>85</sup> There are sociological factors as well in his music's reception history. As long as Carter was considered the most complex composer in the United States, the charge of "incomprehensibility" came with the turf. However, as soon as Brian Ferneyhough, a British composer, moved permanently to the United States, the critical reception to Carter's music changed dramatically. One could now read and hear statements such as, "In contrast to Ferneyhough's music, which is incomprehensible, Carter's scores are musical and are thought out from the point of view of the listener." Predictably, as soon as Ferneyhough achieved "master" status, the same arguments were

Although Taruskin presents minimally competent analyses of Carter's earlier works,<sup>86</sup> based on decades-old analyses of the sort that have long been found in undergraduate textbooks,<sup>87</sup> he has omitted all discussion of the in general clearly audible background harmonic sonorities central to Carter's works from the 1960s on. Either this is owing to a lack of scholarly ambition or it is owing to a conscious decision to omit evidence that would undermine the point he seems eager to make, namely that harmonic organization in Carter's music is either lacking or imperceptible.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps Taruskin should have spent a bit more time listening to

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used, with a different content: now Ferneyhough's works were beautifully thought-out and demonstrated mastery of form, etc., whereas younger composers placed impossible and incomprehensible challenges before performers and listeners.

<sup>86</sup> Taruskin's analyses on pp. 289 and 298-299, which attempt to provide examples of Carter's usage of the two all-interval tetrachords in his first two string quartets, lead one to doubt how accurately he is able to perceive materials commonly found in post-tonal music. Ex. 6-12C (p. 289), which attempts to exhibit an all-interval tetrachord, contains an obvious mistake—a sharp sign is missing from the D—resulting in a chord that is not an all-interval tetrachord. Ex. 6-14A and 6-14B (pp. 298-299) contain far-fetched and likely imperceptible identifications of these tetrachords and miss obvious and perceptible ones. For example, in m. 1 of Ex. 6-14B, Taruskin failed to notice the all-interval tetrachord produced by all the short attacks in the bar (in the 2nd Violin and Cello: G–F#–E–C). In this bar, the sustained Viola dyad contains a fictional B# not appearing in the original score, where one instead finds a B–F dyad (m. 621). Taruskin apparently believed that this fictional B# was real, thereby circling it, the top note of a short 2nd Violin dyad, and only the lower note of a sustained Cello dyad (?) in order to produce an all-interval tetrachord (F#–F–D–C [= B#]) that does not actually exist at this point of the piece. This is an astonishing error for any professional analyst of the Second String Quartet to make. A central premise of the piece is that each instrument has a different character and a different set of characteristic intervals. The Viola's most characteristic interval is the (sounding) tritone (the B–F found in the score; the closing lyrical gesture of the piece, which appears in Ex. 6-14B, is the Violist's tritone). Taruskin should have known that the B#–F printed in his example must have been an anomaly or a mistake, as this would be the Cello's characteristic interval of a (sounding) fourth. Owing to this mistake, Taruskin did not notice several interlinked all-interval tetrachords appearing in the opening measure of Ex. 6-14B, in which—as is common for Carter at moments of peak tension—one can clearly hear an octatonic set.

In mm. 2-4 of the same example, Taruskin has grouped the short Cello dyad in m. 2 to the two 2nd Violin dyads two bars later (?), which duplicate the Cello dyad's pitches respectively two and three octaves higher (?); what is more, Taruskin includes both notes of the first 2nd Violin dyad but only the top note of the second dyad (?). To top off this imaginative grouping decision, Taruskin also includes the cello dyad in the same bar—but only the top note (?). This does not make perceptual sense; nor does this set of notes (G#–Bb–B–D#) produce an all-interval tetrachord. In m. 4, another grouping includes only the lower note of the second short 2nd Violin dyad (?) and both notes of the Cello dyad (thus, the same short dyad is counted twice, with only the top note belonging to one group and both notes belonging to another!); this set of notes (Bb–B–D–D#–E) does manage to include an all-interval tetrachord, but also includes a superfluous pitch.

In this single example, Taruskin, even granted the vaunted editorial support of the Oxford University Press, has made enough errors to have failed, or at best barely passed, the sort of examination on this piece I give every year to undergraduates.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Robert Cogan and Pozzi Escott, *Sonic Design* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, c1976), which uses Carter's Second String Quartet as a centerpiece of its presentation. This textbook was in continuous use for over a quarter century.

<sup>88</sup> In a later discussion of Fred Lerdahl's universalist analytic theory, modeled on Western common-practice tonal music, Taruskin notes that it might consign Carter's celebrated complexity of



Carter's music than reading ancient analyses of it; even a musician with only average training should be able to pick out by ear core elements of the omnipresent

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construction to the level of "a kind of music perceived very locally, often as a sequence of gestures and associations" (p. 448). It is not surprising that a universalist theory prejudiced toward Western tonal music will find other kinds of music lacking. What is surprising is Taruskin's failure to rain critical scorn on this academic Western universalism, especially in light of the fact that two pages later (p. 450) he approvingly cites Leonard B. Meyer as claiming that "It is a mistake—albeit a common one—to conceptualize the problem as a search for 'musical' universals. *There are none.*"

In fact, Taruskin admits that Lerdahl's arguments "have to depend on something other than direct empirical confirmation" (p. 449) which, if true, should indicate that it does not meet Karl Popper's central requirement that scientific theories be falsifiable. Certainly the fact that Lerdahl is unable to explain why and how why some listeners demonstrably derive great pleasure and meaning from music that Lerdahl claims violates universally-valid cognitive constraints should have led Taruskin to treat the theory with some caution. Nevertheless, he uses Lerdahl's scientific arguments to cast doubt on the musical viability of post-tonal music, leading him by p. 454 to speak of the "necessity for congruency between composing grammars and listening grammars." It is striking how Taruskin's thoroughgoing relativism vanishes when it comes to invalidating modern music he does not understand or like.

Similarly, Taruskin employs Meyer's argument concerning bio-physical universals (p. 450-451), which purportedly limit the number of elements "that can be comprehensibly related" to "Seven, Plus or Minus Two" (p. 450), in order to invalidate microtonal music. If Lerdahl's theory is unfalsifiable, Meyer's is not—it is simply false. Meyer was apparently not aware that most Western tuning systems in use prior to the nineteenth century—indeed, most of the music that has ever been heard in the world—could easily be considered microtonal when judged by the standards of modern twelve-tone equal temperament, which Meyer assumed had been the norm through much of Western musical history. Although not all the resources of older "microtonal" systems were widely used, there was broad awareness in specialized circles of the possibilities of creating tonal progressions using more tones than Meyer's rule limiting the number of elements "that can be comprehensibly related" to "Seven, Plus or Minus Two" (p. 450). More than seven elements are employed in both the Renaissance/Baroque-era syntonic tuning and Ben Johnston's "microtonal" (yet tonal) music. For a reliable and magnificently detailed history of "microtonal" music since the Renaissance, see Patrizio Barbieri, *Enharmonic: Instruments and Music 1470-1900* (Latina: Il Levante Libreria Editrice, 2008). For experienced performers and audiences of the more adventurous new music of recent times, Meyer's strictures against microtonality appear just as ridiculous as earlier warnings about the unplayability of the music of the Second Viennese School or the impossibility of Carter's music now appear.

A recent theory of tonality developed by Henry Burnett and Roy Nitzberg, presented in *Composition, Chromaticism and the Developmental Process* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007), posits tonal systems containing eleven "comprehensibly related" elements, with historical antecedents stretching back at least as far as Orlando de Lasso.

Moreover, the b minor fugue subject in the first book of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier comprehensibly relates all twelve pitch classes, and numerous passages of Bach's music (and many of Mozart's and Beethoven's, for that matter; see, for example, the opening theme of the Waldstein sonata, op. 53) employ more than nine comprehensibly-related pitch classes. Common (indeed, almost garden-variety) Romantic-era harmonic progressions routinely contain and comprehensively relate more than nine and often all twelve pitch classes (for example, in a major key,  $I - V7/IV - IV - Ger+6 = V/Np - Np - V - i$ , or  $I - IV - V7/bIII - V7/bVI - bVI - Ger+6 - V$ ). Late-Romantic composers such as Max Reger routinely employ more than nine comprehensibly-related pitch classes. Numerous clearly tonal passages by skilled twentieth century composers such as Samuel Barber or Bohuslav Martinu comprehensively relate more than nine and sometimes all twelve pitch classes. The empirical evidence disproving Meyer's theory is overwhelming.

background sonority in a work of Carter's such as *Night Fantasies*. Had Taruskin listened to the first thirty seconds and the last thirty seconds of the piece, he would surely have noticed the same "tonic" background sonority, which also returns throughout the piece.

Of course, the aesthetic questions are not identical to the perceptual ones; Carter strove to create music that works on a variety of levels; detailed perception of all pitch relationships is not required in order to perceive the dramatic interactions and underlying formal dynamics; this is the point that Porter was making, but which Taruskin willfully misinterpreted.<sup>89</sup> Detailed pitch perception enriches one's understanding of this drama, in a similar manner that it enriches one's perception of the dramatic interactions in a Mozart opera. Obviously, the vocabulary and core musical syntax of Mozart's music, with its quasi-linguistic norms (stereotyped cadential types, antecedent-consequent structures, and the like) are far easier to perceive, above all for listeners trained to hear them. However, the harmonic idiom of Carter's music is quite clear, audible, and coherent for those who have studied and grown accustomed to his music, a demonstrable fact that Taruskin has not bothered to bring to the attention of the reader. It seems obvious that traditional tonal vocabulary and norms should not serve as an absolute standard invalidating the music of highly accomplished composers working within different idioms and according to different norms. One would least expect this approach from an author ideologically committed to the relativity of all aesthetic values.

Having attempted to question the status of Carter as a composer on biographical (i.e., his "elite" background) and aesthetic/perceptual grounds, Taruskin then proceeds to question the means by which his music was promoted, associating these efforts with the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, Taruskin cannot resist including salacious details that are irrelevant to the coherent portion of his argument, although crucial to the guilt-by-association train. One of these is the payment of \$5,000 to Stravinsky to attend the Congress of Cultural Freedom Rome festival in 1954, when Carter's quartet was "unveiled to European acclaim" (p. 294). Taruskin quotes David Schiff as remarking that this performance and the review of William Glock, the controller of music at the BBC,

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<sup>89</sup> Taruskin seems to have forgotten that Carter, in a passage Taruskin cites on p. 277, speaks of "the problem of time-continuity and of producing feelings of tension and release and therefore of musical motion in the listener." This is obviously a listener-centered aesthetic, and one shared by most composers of his generation. Unfortunately, Taruskin's grand historical scheme does not allow for such inconvenient facts.

<sup>90</sup> Taruskin relies greatly on the research of Frances Stonor Saunders in *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000), although this book concentrates far more on literary magazines such as *Encounter* than on the music scene. It gives a much more detailed picture of CIA-backed efforts to counter the Soviet Union's perceived post-World War II dominance of the cultural sphere than was possible when these efforts were first revealed and extensively discussed in the late 1960's; it does not, however, offer significant new cultural perspectives on this era. More finely-honed research of this period has been conducted by authors such as Mark Carroll, in his *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

"immediately established Carter's European reputation (p. 293). Taruskin notes that this "plugged Carter's new direction into the politics of the cold war," and discusses the role of the CIA in funding the Congress (pp. 293-5).

Taruskin thus presents a narrative in which the CIA created the conditions that led to Carter's high European reputation, this in turn leading inevitably to the "elite" acceptance of his status as a master. One needs only a moment to see through the trick Taruskin is playing. The Congress for Cultural Freedom had an impact on many careers, as any high-profile festival will tend to do, and the CIA funding was a necessary condition of the existence of the Congress. But the question is not whether many consequences followed from the funding of the Congress, but rather which consequences can be reasonably connected to which causes. The CIA provided funds, but the Congress made the decisions; if another funding source had supported the Congress, then it might very well have made the same sort of decisions as were actually made. After all, funding from the Ford Foundation was also a necessary condition for the existence of the festival, but there is no evidence that the composers selected by the Congress immediately began serving as spokespersons for automobiles. Many composers were happy to have their works performed in this festival, but this is because they were happy to have their works performed in a prominent venue, not because they were necessarily eager to be associated with the CIA, whose funding of the Congress was secret and not revealed until the 1960s.<sup>91</sup>

More to the point, there is not a shred of evidence that Carter wrote his First Quartet with the plan in mind to make use of the CIA-funded Congress. Neither is there a shred of evidence that the CIA created the Congress in order to further Carter's music. An opportunity such as the Congress offered will always attract many composers, but not a single one of the composers performed at the Congress shared Carter's subsequent compositional path or his musical aims and aesthetic views. It is extremely unlikely that the Congress or the CIA determined the creative career of Carter, or, for that matter, any of the composers featured by the Congress.<sup>92</sup>

What is more, although Carter's First String Quartet did win him recognition in Europe, it did not instantly establish him in Europe as a "master." It

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<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that the vast majority of the abuses that the CIA (founded in 1949) committed over a period of decades had not yet occurred by the early 1950's, the period under discussion in Taruskin's book, and were not widely known until the Church Congressional Committee hearings in the 1970s.

<sup>92</sup> A comparison of Taruskin's *Oxford History* treatment of Tchaikovsky's close relationship to the repressive nobility ruling late-Tsarist Russia is in order. Tchaikovsky knew that Alexander III was authoritarian, yet accepted financial and political support from him for the last part of his life. Taruskin does not offer the slightest criticism of Tchaikovsky for this decision, and hides the evidence that the success of Tchaikovsky's career was dependent on such royal patronage. In contrast, it is highly unlikely that Carter knew that the CIA was providing funding for the Congress of Cultural Freedom, and the support he received amounted to the reception of an award for one composition and the work's public performance. On this basis, Taruskin implies that the success of Carter's compositional career was determined by the CIA.

was not until Pierre Boulez began championing his works decades later that they began to appear regularly on Central European programs, and then mostly in France. Only after the next generation of British musicians such as Oliver Knussen began performing his music did the explosion of performances occur. But this did not happen everywhere; in the early 1990s Carter's name did not even appear in some standard reference works for contemporary music in Germany, which has one of the most developed infrastructures for new music in the world. Thus, Taruskin's implication that CIA funding "made" Carter's career is difficult to take seriously.

Taruskin entitles a discussion of Carter's Second String Quartet, "A Wholly Disinterested Art?"—the question mark serving, as is common for Taruskin, as a sort of "weasel word" means of evading responsibility for the judgments he is furtively implying—vaguely implying both an association with CIA funding and an ambition for success that would lead Carter to consume over 2,000 pages in manuscript sketches for this piece (pp. 295-296, p. 298).<sup>93</sup> Taruskin seems intent on ignoring the obvious: there were far easier means for achieving reknown than by toiling away for years, with no guarantee for popular, critical, or "elite" success, on a work that had almost no previous models. John Cage achieved far greater fame (and notoriety) with *4'33"*, a work that theoretically could have been composed in an hour or so. Perhaps in Carter's case—a possibility Taruskin resolutely dismisses or avoids—some truly original and extraordinary music was emerging.

But to concede this point would be to admit a radically indeterminate—but not "arbitrary," one of Taruskin's favored weasel words—element into the equation. If human freedom is allowed, then Taruskin's top-down sociological readings of every event or opinion of which he disapproves would lose much of their credibility. When Rosen maintains that "serious art music will survive as long as there are musicians who want to play it," Taruskin mocks him by writing, "The history of music, in short, is created by musicians, and only by musicians." This is not what Rosen said, but Taruskin needs to make him say it, in order to move on to his next point: "To maintain this...is to ignore the social factors, above all the prestige machine and its political stimuli, that could counter, and even overbalance the audience...in influencing the course of history" (p. 305). Taruskin thus reveals the essentialism at the core of his enterprise: audiences naturally respond to "social" composers; however, this response mechanism is so sensitive and easily distorted that it must be protected from all "prestige machines," which he apparently believes only function in support of "antisocial" composers. Thus, any choices individual musicians make to support the music they respect are always already doomed to co-optation at the hands of "prestige machines": in Taruskin's game, any individual decisions that run counter to "natural" audience tastes must be suppressed at all costs.

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<sup>93</sup> At one point (Vol. 5, p. 328), Taruskin compares accounts of Carter's herculean efforts composing the Second String Quartet to the advertising flaunting the amount of money spent producing an ambitious 1970s rock album. Taruskin thus equates money spent with creative time and labor expended.

Taruskin appears to be unwilling to acknowledge that "prestige machines" usually work in the favor of popular composers such as Aaron Copland or Leonard Bernstein. They are crucial to the success of a democratic state-supported "social" composers such as Britten or Communist state-sponsored composers such as Shostakovich or imperially-backed "social" composers such as Tchaikovsky. Individual musicians creating or supporting new and unusual types of music are in general fighting a losing battle *against* these "prestige machines." In Taruskin's view, "asocial" composers have already had too great an impact on the history of the art form, and one gets the distinct impression that a primary aim of the *History* is to ensure that such dangerous types never have a chance of succeeding in the future.

But let us analyze Taruskin's means of nullifying individual initiative: the prestige machine is a "social factor," which employs "political stimuli" (i.e., social stimuli) to "overbalance the audience," "the audience" in Taruskin's universe always representing society. Thus, social factors employ social stimuli to overbalance society. The vacuity of this statement is fairly clear; no real human agents are responsible for anything, and amorphous forces are free to do their dastardly work. It must be emphasized that it is precisely this sort of evasive rhetoric that Taruskin pledged to avoid in his Introduction.<sup>94</sup>

In the next paragraph Taruskin writes, "But as the story of Carter's reception makes especially clear, the asocial esthetic is itself a powerful tradition, and governments have at times played a significant role in its propagation." Note that the voluntary support of Carter's music by individual musicians is now implicated with the efforts of governments to propagate national composers; one supposes the purpose of this near-paranoid rhetoric is to summon up the memory of Wagner's music in a Leni Riefenstahl film. However, it is difficult for any sane and informed person to believe that Carter's music could ever be effectively used as government propaganda or to arouse the masses. It is, on the other hand, easy to imagine tonal or popular music being used for this purpose; indeed, one can still find this happening in North Korea's mass dance festivals.

But perhaps Taruskin should have provided a concrete example that would have given relevancy to his dark forebodings. He might have looked across the ocean toward a major country that actually did relentlessly promote one of its composers to the point that his name came to represent the nation's music. He might have brought up the dangerous example of Benjamin Britten.

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<sup>94</sup> See especially pp. XVIII-XIX, Vol. 1, where he castigates fellow musicologists for precisely the fault he has committed. He criticizes van der Toorn's prose on p. XIX in the following terms: "...it is ideologically committed to its impersonality. Its elimination of human agency is calculated..."

## E. Case Study Four: Steve Reich

The partisan nature of Taruskin's history of recent music becomes especially clear in the section on Steve Reich and Minimalism.<sup>95</sup> Up until this point in his history, with few exceptions (Britten being one), Taruskin maintains a degree of critical distance from the music he is discussing. However, in his chapter on the Minimalists in Vol. 5, "A Harmonious Avant-Garde," it appears that Taruskin has abandoned all critical distance and assumed the role of publicist, above all for the composer he appears to view as the most significant of our era, Steve Reich. Taruskin's discussions of works are now largely perfunctory explanations of what the composer did rather than explorations of how a listener might have perceived what the composer aimed to do. Thus, he makes a striking exception to the method he has fitfully followed throughout the history of Western music, in that he now assumes a fairly direct, "noise-free" relationship between listener perception and compositional plan. In other words, he commits the very poietic fallacy that he has cast as a central sin of Romanticism, the main villain of the last fifteen-hundred pages of his epic. Oddly enough—an irony apparently missed by Taruskin—the "noise-free" model of congruence between compositional plan and listener perception adhered to by musical Minimalists such as Reich and praised by Taruskin is scarcely distinguishable from a central tenet of late-Modernist Formalism, which Art Berman has characterized as follows: "Meaning and method are fused; so are content and form. They have become more than bonded; they have become unified."<sup>96</sup> The main problem here is that Taruskin seems not to understand that his central late-twentieth century historical fable—that the omnipresence of diatonic sonorities in Minimalism satisfied a gaping hunger of "the audience" for a return to tonality (which, in fact, had never left)—is trapped in simplistic essentialism: once tonal sonorities are present, all problems are solved and all criticism goes out the window.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> None of these comments should be read as an attempt to disparage the music of Steve Reich, many of whose works I admire greatly.

<sup>96</sup> Art Berman, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> The primary exception to this being, predictably, his criticisms (from which he exempts the Estonian Arvo Pärt) of two leading European neotonalists, the Minimalist Louis Andriessen and the quasi-mystic John Tavener. He criticizes Andriessen (Vol. 5, pp. 398-399) for employing dissonance in *De Staat* to create an "edge of resistance," claiming that dissonance "has always most dependably alienated the very audience which politically activist or populist composers claim to address." Taruskin has neglected to observe that *De Staat* apparently did not alienate audiences too grievously or for too long, instead becoming a fairly popular work in the genre.

In addition, Taruskin, banging the "academic Modernists versus non-academic Minimalists" drum, incorrectly states that "[A]lone among the major minimalists, he [Andriessen] occupies a distinguished academic chair." Numerous Minimalist and Minimalist-influenced composers hold academic positions; is it not "elitist" for Taruskin to judge some as "distinguished" and the rest as undistinguished? Indeed, why should supposedly non-elitist Minimalists want to hold a "distinguished academic chair?"

Taruskin here also revives one of his favored anti-European tactics, accusing Andriessen of "radical chic" for accepting state sponsorship as a means of expressing his radical politics. Taruskin,

Central to Taruskin's tactics in this section is his positing of Terry Riley as a representative of a "harmonious avant-garde" (pp. 366-368), a concept which he will use to validate Steve Reich as an avant-gardist in relationship to the "elite modernism" of the academy (p. 368).

It is crucial to remember that the core meaning of "avant-garde" in the arts has always involved group of people working in the belief that they constitute the forward edge of progress. If Taruskin cannot produce testimony from the actual actors in the Minimalist scene that they viewed themselves as an avant-garde, then his strategy will obviously be incoherent, given his commitment to telling history "as it actually was" and not as "we" see it. Taruskin provides no such testimony in his entire chapter. Therefore, his loaded hints—which through repetition seem, as through a sort of autosuggestion, to transform into confirmed facts—that the Minimalists constituted an avant-garde appear to be after-the-fact validations, i.e., components of the sort of "prestige machine" he has harshly criticized throughout his epic.

Because he is committed to treating the Minimalists as the avant-garde yet lacks their own affirmation for belonging to the avant-garde, it is necessary for him to change the meaning of this term. On pp. 366-367, Taruskin offers of series of suggestions for what "avant-garde" *might* mean in relationship to Terry Riley's "harmonic simplicity". Considering that we are in the fifth volume of a vast epic, it appears somewhat late to search toward a definition of a term that on pp. 285-286 of Vol. 3 (i.e., ca. fifteen hundred pages earlier) Taruskin claimed was crucial to his story from that point on.

Better late than never. Taruskin does not in fact offer a reasonable definition, grounded in evidence, of what "avant-garde" means; rather, he simply offers us a grab-bag of possible meanings, as though his failure to offer a defensible definition were the fault of the term itself, or perhaps of the historical actors. We learn that Riley was avant-gardist in that he was marginalized but that he was not avant-gardist because he was not alienated, owing to his acceptance of tonal sonorities (surely an essentialist assumption!). But then again, he was avant-gardist in his "disinterested service of art in implied protest against its commercial exploitation." A moment's reflection would lead one to question why Taruskin would consider that someone who protested against commercial exploitation (Vol. 5, pp. 366-367) and whose "main communication with the outer world was in the

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whose tenured faculty position allows him to sound off freely on political matters, must appreciate the spectacle presented to outside observers (i.e., "the reading audience") of one "tenured radical" criticizing another for selling out.

Taverner is mildly criticized (p. 410) for using Western tempered tuning, although by pp. 450-451 Taruskin has apparently forgotten this criticism, as he invokes Leonard Meyer's "biopsychological" (i.e., universalist) argument to invalidate microtonality.

form of recordings" of "all-night improvisation concerts for small, devoted countercultural audiences" (p. 366) was not "alienated" from society.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout Vols. 3 through 5, Taruskin has consumed vast amounts of ink warning, sometimes in nearly Zhdanovite fashion, against the dangers of composers isolating themselves from "the audience."<sup>99</sup> Yet when it comes to the Minimalists, all of these evil tendencies turn into something good. The answer to this riddle appears to be that the Minimalists' "antisocial" activities were in fact not antisocial because they were using diatonic harmonies. As with the renowned Fideist defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, it must be true, precisely because it is absurd.

On p. 367 we learn that Riley's "reembracement of consonance...was retrograde only from the historicist perspective, which required that all art build directly on the achievement of the immediate past, and toward a goal that those earlier achievements implied. That was never the aim of the avant-garde." Unfortunately, this definition is in fact in keeping with mainstream usage of the term, whose meaning Taruskin is now attempting to change. What is more, in Vol. 3, Taruskin provided just such a definition of the avant-garde in his discussion of Franz Brendel and Liszt (pp. 411, 416, 418, and 420, where Hegelian progressivist historicism is front and center).

For Taruskin, "reembracement" of tonality contains not the slightest taint of restorationism, and the "re-" does not imply any sense of historical sequence. In fact, Taruskin has artfully hidden from our view the overwhelming dominance of tonal composers in America throughout the post-World War II period. Why was it so historically significant (i.e., avant-gardist) for tonal composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass, who were trained by other tonal composers such as William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti, in a country dominated by tonal music, to re-embrace tonal music? In Taruskin's counter-reality, the answer is obvious—their decision to "re-embrace tonality" was an acknowledgement of a fundamental (i.e., essentialist) truth: tonality (or, in Taruskin's hands, its weaker stand-in, "consonance") is necessary for audience acceptance, and that's that.

We are next treated, as in a moment of divine revelation, to the true meaning of the avant-garde: it is the "rejection of yesterday's modernism" (p. 367). Thus, Minimalists rejected post-World War II Formalist Modernism, as the latter earlier rejected Stravinskian Modernism, as it in turn had earlier rejected late-Romantic Modernism. However, Postmodern composers also rejected post-tonality and re-embraced tonality, as did neo-Romantic composers; were both groups therefore in the avant-garde? Were George Rochberg or Ned Rorem, who

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<sup>98</sup> One must emphasize yet again that Taruskin has consistently used "society" in the context of democratic societies to mean "society as a whole," criticizing as "undemocratic" attempts to create small circles of interest in and support for artists.

<sup>99</sup> Andrey Alexandrovich Zhdanov was the theorist of socialist realism in the Soviet Union. In a series of conferences in the late 1940s, he attacked leading Soviet artists who strayed from the party line; in a famous conference on music in 1948, he denounced, among others, the leading Soviet composers Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich.



vehemently denounced avant-gardist Modernism, in fact closet avant-gardists? Were the Postmodern composers who challenged the entire notion of artistic progress therefore standing at the vanguard of historical progress? Surely it is not difficult to understand that the phrase "rejection of *yesterday's* [added emphasis] modernism" implies that the historical actors Taruskin claims were avant-gardists understood history in terms of a historical sequence and were to some degree progressivist historicists.

Although we still have not received a definition of the avant-garde that holds water for the Minimalists, Taruskin begins sprinkling the text with "avant-garde" in his discussion of Steve Reich, where it is often treated as an antonym of "elite modernist." We learn on p. 368 that Reich's academic training at the Juilliard School and at Mills College "was the sort of training that usually led to a career as an elite modernist rather than an avant-gardist;" by "elite modernist," one supposes that Taruskin means "East Coast atonal or serial composer."

Let us look both at the evidence Taruskin provides and that which he suppresses. Reich's training included compositional studies with tonal composers Hall Overton (a jazz-influenced tonal composer), and, at the Juilliard School, William Bergsma (who explicitly rejected serialism; this fact is not mentioned by Taruskin), and Vincent Persichetti (a tonal composer who focused on quartal harmonies; this fact is not mentioned by Taruskin); in fact, the composition faculty of the Juilliard School was dominated by tonal composers, something that Taruskin does not make clear. Later, Reich studied with the eclectic European serialist Luciano Berio at Mills College,<sup>100</sup> which had a free-wheeling reputation that was antithetical to the East Coast "elite modernists" (a fact not mentioned by Taruskin). Again on p. 370 we are told that this was—both the East-coast tonal training at Juilliard and the anti-East Coast experimental training at Mills College—a "modernist upbringing," even though on p. 368 he had emphasized that the training at Juilliard was "rigorous and traditional (though nonserial)," which should make it non-Modernist. By this point, it is already difficult enough to tell whether Reich's training at Juilliard was "Modernist" because it was "traditional," or if the anti-East Coast atmosphere at Mills College was "Modernist" because it was anti-traditional. Yet more layers of confusion are soon to appear.

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<sup>100</sup> Note that Steve Reich, in *Writings, 1966-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 202, expresses his gratitude to Luciano Berio for suggesting that he abandon attempts to write twelve-tone music and instead write tonal music. Reich indicates that the desire to write twelve-tone music was instilled in him at Juilliard, but it is difficult to understand who precisely "forced" Reich to write twelve-tone music; was it his composition teachers, who were tonal composers? On pp. 8-9, especially p. 9, Reich's memories of his experiences in his formative years contrast dramatically with Taruskin's portrayal. For example, Reich notes that "writing in the twelve-tone style actually was the beginning, in a sense, of the kind of thinking that I continued in my own music." "Studying with Berio at that time was extremely exciting. Serialism was just then becoming known in this country, and he was a primary member of the team." Although Taruskin portrays Reich's rejection of the academy in heroic terms appropriate for an "avant-gardist" hero, Reich writes about his move to California as follows: "Like most people who go to California, I was getting away from something—my family, primarily."

On p. 389, Taruskin notes that Philip Glass studied at Juilliard at the same time as Reich and with the same teachers, Bergsma and Persichetti; these teachers were "more successful in instilling in Glass the neoclassical and public-spirited values of the preserial American academy."<sup>101</sup> In other words, according to Taruskin, in the same institution at the same time, the same tonal composition teachers forced Reich to be an "elite modernist" and successfully trained Glass to be a "public-spirited" composer. One could perhaps venture that these teachers assumed contrasting personas on alternating days of the week. However, it would be more reasonable to assume that Taruskin's history is, to say the very least, highly unreliable.

In the recounting of Reich's early career, we are deluged in "avant-garde's": he was an avant-gardist at the age of 15 when he first heard Stravinsky and Bach (p. 368; does Taruskin really believe that every teenager discovering Classical or Modernist music is an avant-gardist?), he was associated with avant-gardists at the San Francisco Tape Music Center (p. 369; one must note that on p. 368 Mills College was associated with an "elite modernist" education), and then on p. 370 we learn that the "provocative modesty" of Reich's acceptance of the phase phenomenon in his music was "genuinely avant-garde," and three lines later that Reich represented a "true avant-garde movement" in opposition to the "academic modernists from whose ranks Reich had defected" (i.e., the tonal composers with whom he studied who, in Taruskin's telling, somehow abused Reich).

According to Taruskin, Reich's "shock-the-bourgeois gesture" involved renouncing complexity and social alienation. This "lack of social alienation" involved creating his own ensemble and performing mostly in art museums, "alternative music" downtown (New York) halls, and college campuses (p. 379), rather than for "the audience" in standard concert halls. It is difficult to comprehend how Taruskin could understand Reich's behavior in such terms, especially in light of the facts that first he has consistently treated "the audience" (i.e., the mainstream audience) as representative of society, and second he has persistently criticized Brahms, the composers of the New German school, and countless contemporary composers for focusing their interests on exclusive circles rather than on the broader audience.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> This is certainly an odd claim for Taruskin to make in view of the fact that the Composition Department at the Juilliard School in the time period under discussion was nonserial, and very nearly anti-serial. What is more, the Juilliard School never became a bastion of serialism, so Taruskin's "preserial" is nonsensical. In fact, according to Josef Straus's article, "The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s" (*The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 3 [Autumn, 1999], pp. 301-343), during the period under discussion, serialists formed a clear minority in composition departments in the United States. If any serialists were allowed into the faculty in most schools, in practically all cases they formed a minority of the composition department.

<sup>102</sup> On p. 383, Taruskin claims that the "critical perspective" of Reich's *Drumming*, "hostile to existing institutions and established social relations and even threatening them, makes it...essential to regard *Drumming* as being, within its own context (and despite its mounting popularity), an avant-garde composition. It produced historical change." At the end of this passage we have yet another definition of "avant-garde," which is finally closer in spirit to Victor Hugo's conception of

In fact, when Reich's music was first performed for "the audience" in Carnegie Hall, Taruskin notes (p. 379) that it caused a minor scandal, with audience members, irritated by its repetitiveness, shouting, "All right, I'll confess." Was this a sign of its "non-alienating" nature? If pressed on this point, one supposes that Taruskin might suggest that all the members of the conservative New York concert audience had previously been brainwashed by the serial Modernists; however, Taruskin also implies that these same audiences had long since rejected serial music. Or he might suggest that they had been "infected" by Germanic music to value harmonic directionality in music: this way, the entire symphonic tradition would be at fault for the rejection of Reich's piece.

What is mystifying is why the initial rejection by "the audience" of Reich's music is not interpreted the same way that Taruskin interpreted initial audience bafflement or outright rejection of complex, difficult music in the case of composers such as Schoenberg or Carter: audience tastes are correct, the composers wrong. Inexplicably, in Reich's case, Taruskin falls back upon the "great man" narrative, in which initial rejection of an avant-garde master gives way to audience acceptance (pp. 387-388), conveniently ignoring the role "elite" validations and advocacy—including those of Taruskin, the renowned musicologist and champion of Steve Reich—played in this acceptance.

On pp. 371-372, Taruskin brings Kant's *Zweckmässigkeit* into play in order to buff up Reich's aesthetic manifesto, "Music as a Gradual Process," which expounds an aesthetic that fuses sounding music and automatic processes.

The distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine all the note-to-note (sound-to-sound) details and the overall form simultaneously...I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music.

...[O]nce the process is set up and loaded, it runs by itself.

While performing and listening to gradual musical processes, one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual...[that] makes possible that shift of attention away from *he* and *she* and *you* and *me* outward toward *it*.

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the avant-garde in the Preface to *Les Misérables*, although unlike it in lacking any clear rational motivation for bringing about historical change. Unfortunately, Taruskin's revised definition does not appear to have much to do with Reich's *Drumming*; he certainly offers no evidence that Reich promised historic change with this piece. And has not Taruskin repeatedly ridiculed precisely this kind of historicist myth?

Even if one grants that Reich's *Drumming* was "hostile to existing institutions" and so forth, it is difficult to help noticing that he was performing in colleges and art galleries. Was Reich actually attempting to overthrow these institutions? Precisely which universities did Reich threaten, and how? And, more importantly, why? This latter question is particularly difficult to answer once one takes into consideration the fact that universities were sponsoring performances of Reich's works.

[T]he composer isn't privy to anything...I don't know of any secrets of structure that you can't hear.<sup>103</sup>

Taruskin appears not to have noticed that this manifesto consists of shared tropes of the Minimalist branch of artistic Formalism. At the time he wrote this manifesto, Reich was working closely with Minimalist artists such as Sol Lewitt and performing mostly in art galleries; it is clear that he picked up much of his rhetoric and conceptual content from artworld Minimalism, although there are novelties in his application of them to musical processes. Granted that there are significant differences between the Formalisms of Babbitt, Cage, and Reich, there is nothing in Reich's manifesto to justify Taruskin's judgment on p. 372: "The composer's ascendancy over the listener was overthrown. Reich deliberately cast himself, like Schoenberg before him, as a Great Emancipator. But whereas Schoenberg (like Cage) purported to liberate sounds, Reich (like a sixties agitator) was out to liberate people." Where in Reich's manifesto has Taruskin found a rhetoric of social agitation and liberation? How does listening to a single process unfold itself liberate people? How has the composer written for the listener's needs, or allowed the listener free room to decide what he or she believes is significant? And until Reich's manifesto appeared, were people who voluntarily attended musical concerts in fact enslaved by composers?<sup>104</sup>

In Reich's early pieces, listeners hear continuous processes, which they may or may not want to follow out to the bitter end, depending on the listener. Listeners are inside a machine for as long as the piece lasts; the fact that they can hear all the moving parts does not mean that they are liberated from the machine.

We learn later about the arduous efforts required of the performers in order for the "product" "to be effectively 'humanized' and rendered communicative...The difficulty of this music, requiring skilled professionals for its performance, thereby satisfying a traditional elite modernist criterion, has made Reich...the most academically acceptable [of the Minimalists]" (p. 373). This is truly a virtuoso act on Taruskin's part. The musical materials are to be "humanized" by performers even though Reich's manifesto explicitly directs attention away from the human to the "it"; in Reich's manifesto, the processes determine what is heard by humans, not the other way around. When Modernists "force" performers to learn and perform arduous tasks, they are ridiculed (see Taruskin's reaction to the New Complexity on pp. 475-476), but when Minimalists do so, all criticism is suspended. Taruskin evades discussing Minimalist composers' responsibility for "humanizing" the often inhuman, physically brutal challenges in many of their works at the expense of real humans, some of whom suffered tendonitis as a result. He accomplishes this by managing to blame academic elites yet again, this time because they are interested

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<sup>103</sup> Steve Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process" (1968), in Steve Reich, *Writings on Music 1965-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 34-36, condensed.

<sup>104</sup> Taruskin's rhetoric of liberation here is not only misdirected, it is offensive: did Reich really risk life and limb in the service of his goals in a manner comparable to those who risked being beaten or killed for marching in the Southern states for civil rights?

in the music! In Taruskin's game, it is impossible for his favorites to lose, and for academic elites (excepting himself) to do anything right.

Further on, Taruskin describes Reich's music in terms of "a model of harmonious social interaction" (p. 380), which consisted of providing "himself and his audience with something to which they could subject themselves together" (p. 383). The relationship of performers in *Music for 18 Musicians* is described as being modeled on an African ensemble, "in which all the players, the composer included, impersonally submit, sacrificing their individual freedom not to a specially empowered individual who alone is free, but to a collective and transcendent ideal of ecstasy-producing accuracy."<sup>105</sup> Are "sacrificing individual freedom," and "impersonal submission...to a collective ideal" now to be considered "models of harmonious social interaction?" Taruskin's rhetoric might instead remind those who lived through this turbulent historical period of the common public spectacle of cult behavior that reached a peak in the mid-1970s. A student of twentieth-century history might also be reminded of the mass drills in totalitarian countries such as China during the Cultural Revolution and still to be found in North Korea. Taruskin's implicit praise of this cult-like model, backed up by several pages of adulatory description of the ethnomusicologist John Blacking's neo-Primitivist social-utopian program (pp. 380-383), demonstrates the degree to which he is trapped in a monolithic conception of society.<sup>106</sup> Taruskin fails to notice how dangerous this model of subjection would be if played out on a large societal scale. Certainly if he is going to play the moral watchdog and warn the reader of the supposed dangers in music he does not like (i.e., the absurd hints, discussed above, that Elliott Carter's music might be used for propagandistic purposes by some government), then he should ask a few tough questions about the music of his favorite composers as well.

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<sup>105</sup> Taruskin's characterization in this burst of purple prose is unlikely to conform closely either to Reich's intentions or to those of the virtuosic and thoughtful musicians in his ensemble. It is also difficult to understand either how accuracy can be a "transcendent ideal" (perfection may be, but accuracy, with its relative standards, cannot) or how accuracy can induce ecstasy.

What is especially baffling here is that Taruskin, throughout the last three volumes of his epic, treated the habit of indulging in transcendent ideals as one identifying mark of a (Germanic) "asocial" composer; "social" composers avoided these temptations at all costs, as they would remove the composers from direct contact with the needs of their audience. Now, apparently, Taruskin has switched course: his favorite living "social" composer, Steve Reich, fell for the bait, yet mysteriously managed to remain a "social" composer. Is this yet another benefit accruing to those who employ consonant sonorities?

<sup>106</sup> In yet another editorial harangue on p. 382 by an author who once upon a time (i.e., in his Introduction) made a Baconian promise to attempt a narration "with but slight intermixture of private judgment," Taruskin supports the explicit politicization of academic studies in the new ethnomusicology, hammering away at the "special privileges" and "destructive value system" in the academic study of music. This is, incidentally, the same "destructive" academic system that has allowed Taruskin to enjoy a brilliant career as an academic musicologist.

Especially in this section, Taruskin commits flagrantly the fallacy that David Hackett Fischer (*Historians' Fallacies* [London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1971, c1970], pp. 24-28) has named "The fallacy of declarative questions."

Taruskin appears unwilling to acknowledge that Reich's aesthetic is not in fact a listener-centered aesthetic, but rather still a composer-centered one. The composer subjects himself to rules, producing a musical score to which everyone down the foodchain is subject.<sup>107</sup> The eponymous ensembles of Reich and Glass make the dominant positions of these composers in their ensembles clear. Both Reich and Glass have had successful careers within the composer-dominated model of Western music, with advocates such as Taruskin using the "great man" models of interpretation to support them.<sup>108</sup> How can Taruskin consider this particular model of elite support different in nature than the "prestige machine" he asserts was crucial for winning critical support for Elliott Carter's music?

## **F. Case Study Five: The End of Western Art Music**

In the final two chapters of his history, "After Everything" and "Millenium's End," Taruskin presents the dramatic high point of what he views as the crumbling of the credibility of Modernism. Minimalism, the "true avant-garde," was apparently ahead of the game in the historically inevitable step of a return to tonality. Apparently, this required the voluntary surrender by composers of their artistic freedom in order to conform to posited bio-psychological universals or claimed innate limitations of our listening comprehension (i.e., the theories of Leonard Meyer and Fred Lerdahl, pp. 445-454). Those who did not wish to surrender their artistic autonomy were Modernist dinosaurs resisting the inevitable, and were bound to be left behind by history. That is, if history actually moves forward: is this not precisely the sort of Hegelian progressivist historicism upon which Taruskin has consistently poured his scorn? We will see that Taruskin's conceptual confusion reaches a peak in these closing chapters: he desperately wants to catch the historical train leading to the winners' circle, but he is ideologically committed to denying that such a train exists. He repeatedly attempts to consign progressive temporality to the wastebin of history, but the sprite keeps dusting itself off and crawling into Taruskin's rhetoric through the back door.

Taruskin provides a brief survey of Postmodernism as a sort of covering explanation for a "fundamental ideological change" (p. 411) he believes was experienced by all of Western society in the 1970s and 1980s (pp. 411-414 and 454-455). As described in Part II of this extended essay,<sup>109</sup> this story more or less follows the standard Postmodern-Marxist model, such that changes in the substructure or "basis" precede and cause changes in the superstructure, including

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<sup>107</sup> Note that members of the audience are not allowed to change parts of the score they do not like.

<sup>108</sup> Taruskin also does not notice how the sort of "culture-shopping" found in composers such as Reich and Glass (both of whom did a quick tour into "authentic" non-Western cultures, lending them an aura that enhanced their appeal), although relatively harmless, still relies on the ethnocentrism he consistently skewers throughout his epic.

<sup>109</sup> "The Legitimation Crisis of Progressive New Music in the United States: Parts I-II"; see footnote 1 in Part 1 of the present review, in *Search—Journal for New Music and Culture*, Issue 9 (Fall 2012), <http://www.searchnewmusic.org/>.

the cultural sphere. Taruskin's survey of substructural ("basis") changes leading to superstructural change is desultory at best; he can provide little more rationale than a decline in industrial expansion in the West, this somehow associated with a loss of faith in "historical progress" and the rise of the Green party espousing "'timeless' human and environmental values."<sup>110</sup> When he writes, "And that is perhaps as close to a general definition of postmodernism as we are likely to get" (pp. 413-414), he is simply declaring that he has failed to define Postmodernism adequately (a task that is, admittedly, extremely difficult). His survey not only lacks credibility as a rationale for Postmodernism, it contradicts central aims enunciated in his Introduction (Vol. 1, pp. XVIII-XIX), such as his steadfast intent to avoid such surveys and his commitment to treat humans, rather than impersonal forces, as agents of history. True, one could interpret Taruskin as meaning that "lots of people were doing or believed in 'x'," with "x" being the laundry list given above (upon all of which items, of course, few Postmodernists agreed), motivating adherents to lead us into the Postmodern era. But this ignores the fact that lots of people did not do or believe in "x". Taruskin would probably ascribe the latter, in an *ad hominem* tactic, to their being Modernists. However, there were firmer grounds—such as an ethical adherence to logically coherent, evidence-based reasoning—for not joining the path blazed by most varieties of Postmodernism.

As an explanation of the "fundamental ideological change," Taruskin provides the usual grab-bag of Postmodernist tropes. In the domain of music, he focuses on the challenge Minimalism posed to Modernist beliefs in organicism and "goal-oriented purposiveness"; this challenge managed to "affront and threaten progressive musicians of the older generation in some fundamental way" (p. 411).

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<sup>110</sup> According to this logic, artistic Postmodernism should have been most successful in Continental Europe, where Green parties have had the greatest political success, but this has not been the case. In fact, the greatest success of artistic Postmodernism has been in Anglo-American culture, and above all in American culture, where the Green party has never attracted more than a sliver of the vote in most elections. In fact, the first major cultural wave of Postmodernism arrived in the 1980s, a period that was politically dominated by the "Reagan revolution," with its explicitly anti-Green values. Considering the close linkage between American Postmodernism and corporate sponsorship—one thinks especially of pieces such as Michael Torke's *Yellow Pages*, which openly celebrates corporate values—it is difficult to make a credible case for a necessary linkage between American artistic Postmodernism and a Green political program. Although one could point to significant Green-oriented Minimalist artworks such as Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass's *Koyaanisqatsi*, these form but a minority of the Minimalist repertoire. Numerous post-Minimalist and non-Minimalist composers are, however, far more explicitly oriented toward Green political values than any of the central Minimalist composers.

A form of musical Postmodernism associated with the ideas and music of John Cage and other American experimental composers was influential in certain cultural sectors in Germany, but this movement is distinct both from the German Green party (which is more closely aligned with popular culture) and from Postmodernism as it is generally understood in Anglo-American culture. See, for example, Hermann Danuser, "Postmodernes Musikdenken—Lösung oder Flucht?" in Danuser, ed., *Neue Musik im politischen Wandel: fünf Kongressbeiträge und drei Seminarberichte* (Mainz & New York: Schott Verlag, 1991), pp. 56-66.

In Taruskin's ideology, this "affront and threat" transformed the Minimalists into the "avant-garde."

However, without progressive temporality, one cannot really have a "leading guard" of historical change;<sup>111</sup> one also cannot claim that Postmodernism succeeded Modernism in a historical chain. At most one could claim that some people believed in Postmodernism, and others believed in other movements.

Taruskin also discusses the loss on the part of natural scientists of "their previously unquestioned faith in the desirability of continuing growth and innovation"..."in the shadow of nuclear holocaust and threat of environmental disaster." "Progress, it was increasingly recognized, came at a price" (pp. 413-414). Apparently Taruskin has forgotten that although *some* natural scientists (i.e., real human agents) fell into this funk, *others* (i.e., other real human agents) did not. He has also neglected to observe that the sciences in the last forty years have continued in a path of progressive and ever accelerated growth and innovation.

Taruskin mentions that Richard Heilbroner wrote "presciently" (i.e., using a trope of progressivist temporality) in 1961 about a widespread loss of "historic optimism," and notes that in 1994 "it was easy enough for Leonard Meyer to connect the dots and conclude in retrospect that 'the end of historic optimism marks the beginning of postmodernism'" (pp. 413-414). Note that Taruskin treats an intellectual trend (a claimed "loss of historical optimism") as a sort of agent of history. This trend becomes essentialized to such a degree that a later music theorist—two decades after this trope was developed in writings by architects such as Charles Jencks—needed only to "connect the dots" to reveal this essential truth.

Throughout this discussion (pp. 411-414), Taruskin consistently employs a dramatic/rhetorical method of portraying Modernists as resisting the changes that threatened their elite status. Minimalists are charged by the Modernists with the "deadliest of slurs," namely conservatism, for their return to tonality (p. 411); a lack of "inner necessity" in their music is, in a bit of ham acting on Taruskin's part, "hurled abusively by offended modernists" (p. 413).

Crucial to the success of his aims in this chapter is the confusion of the meanings of "progressive" and "conservative." One can trace his employment of this strategy precisely. On p. 411, he discusses the "confusion (at least in rhetoric) between what was progressive and what was conservative, and an attendant loss of interest in making the distinction." However, a calm analysis might lead one to conclude that this confusion was not necessarily the revelation of an essentialist truth, i.e., that "fundamental ideological change" had occurred. It might have

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<sup>111</sup> One of the quotations at the head of the chapter demonstrates the problem. Charles Jencks is cited (1986) as writing, "The Modern Age, which sounds as if it would last forever, is fast becoming a thing of the past." It is obvious that "becoming" and "thing of the past" imply some sort of progressive temporality. It is difficult in the year 2013 to resist the temptation to replace the subject of Jencks's judgment—i.e., "The Modern Age"—with "The Postmodern Age," especially in light of the hackneyed repetition of the term "postmodern" over the last few decades.



resulted from confusion or incoherence on the part of the historical agents, or the same on the part of the historian. It may indeed have resulted from a failure of the historian to frame the issues accurately and appropriately.

By p. 455 this confusion of meanings is treated—via what appears to be a sort of autosuggestion—as a fact within a progressive-temporal unfolding of history. We read that Postmodernists responded to Modernist "grumblings" by claiming that the "progressive/retrogressive dichotomy is a relic of an outmoded and rightly discredited philosophy of history"..."Modernist ideology...has become old-fashioned." Of course, such historical judgments require adherence to some sort of progressive temporality, something that is programmatically denied by Postmodernism. The confusion is complete, which seems to be Taruskin's aim. Now he can freely employ "progressive" and "conservative" to mean whatever he wants them to mean.

A particularly clear example of this sort of confusion can be found on p. 444, where Taruskin cites David Del Tredici as saying, "for me, tonality was actually a daring discovery. I grew up in a climate in which, for a composer, only dissonance and atonality were acceptable. Right now, tonality is exciting for me. I think I invented it. In a sense, I have." Again, Del Tredici remembers a historical period in which most of the composers in the United States were tonalists as being one in which writing tonal music was not "acceptable" for "a composer." Yet tonality was obviously acceptable for the majority of composers at that time: if it had not been, they would not have been writing tonal music.<sup>112</sup> Del Tredici voluntarily received an education at elite institutions and wrote post-tonal works that achieved some acclaim; he then underwent a stylistic change, but apparently

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<sup>112</sup> This is not to deny the often harsh rhetoric proclaiming the death of tonality employed by some post-tonal composers; however, one should also remember that sharp rhetoric was flying around from all sides. Nevertheless, the fact is inescapable that in most parts of the country, then as now, tonal composition reigned supreme. In most places, it was not acceptable to be a progressive composer of any kind, whether serial, experimental or microtonal.

Note that Del Tredici apparently employs this sort of aggrieved rhetoric for purposes of self-dramatization. A contrasting view of his early experiences with atonality can be found in an interview he gave to Tom Voegeli in July 2002:

Voegeli: So you started out as most folks your age, in the serial world? You began as a modernist?

Del Tredici: It's fair to say. How can I say? I was enormously attracted to dissonance. It was so exciting in the early sixties. It was like we had to do it...

Voegeli: ...It seems like everybody composed à la Schoenberg. You know, studied serialism...you had to write that way.

Del Tredici: It didn't feel like you had to. It was what was exciting. There was a huge battle between the tonalists on the one side, the Americana kind of tonalists, and the new emerging thing. After University of California, I went to Princeton University, which was the center then of contemporary music, dissonance, and Schoenberg, so I got a heavy dose of it.

See [http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview\\_deltredici.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_deltredici.html), accessed July 3, 2013.

forgot that most composers were writing tonal works at the time he was gaining acclaim for writing post-tonal works. Then he began writing tonal works and later claimed that he had discovered tonality.

Did Taruskin take even a moment to consider the absurdity of this story and chastise the composer for fudging the truth in the same manner he has chastised Modernist composers? Obviously not, for on p. 445 he responds, "But flouting (and in puncturing, exposing) the puritanism of the modernist 'high church' is only part of the story." Taruskin not only takes Del Tredici's demonstrably unreliable statements at face value, he uses these unreliable statements as weapons to "expose" a supposedly hidden truth, namely that the Modernists were some sort of secret Puritan sect. Although the nearly gossip-magazine nature of Taruskin's tactics makes a certain narrative impact, it is difficult to believe that a historian of the stature of David Hackett Fischer, who Taruskin cites and imitates (in his specification of a list of fallacies other historians have supposedly committed; see footnote 87), would view Taruskin's historical approach here as anything better than amateurish.

Taruskin employs George Rochberg as a central figure in his dramatic portrayal of the collapse of the Modernist paradigm in the 1970s. He describes Rochberg as a highly respected atonal composer and theorist, pushing advanced contemporary techniques to the limit in competition with innovative Modernists such as Elliott Carter (pp. 414-415). He takes note of Rochberg's proud declaration that "it is impossible to separate the 'what' of a work from its 'how'" was a "singularly concise précis of modernist principles," although, to use Art Berman's terminology, this is in fact a precise description of Formalist principles, but not of Modernist principles *per se*. Taruskin describes Rochberg's gradual inclusion of references to other serial composers, and then to earlier tonal composers, as an extension of collage principles that "remained well within the accepted boundaries of modernist practice, in no way contradicting or threatening its premises" (p. 422).<sup>113</sup> The underpinning for this judgment is Frederic Jamison's distinction between Modernist collage and Postmodernist pastiche, discussed in Part II of this extended essay: collage belongs to Modernity, pastiche to postmodernity.<sup>114</sup>

Taruskin presents Rochberg's Third Quartet as a pivotal work in this historical drama, in that its first movement was predictably atonal, whereas the third movement presented the "shock of the new" (p. 429)<sup>115</sup> in its non-ironic return to a tonal idiom barely distinguishable from that of nineteenth-century Romanticism (pp. 430-431). Taruskin effectively portrays the challenge this presented, in the hands of a Modernist heavyweight, to Modernist dogmas. One could portray some of the conflicts as follows: the piece was seriously-intended, and thus Modernist, but stylistically "regressive" and thus not Modernist; unlike

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<sup>113</sup> Taruskin on pp. 421-422 also presents Henry Brant's pastiche-like multi-ensemble works as collages rather than as pastiches; such a claim is arguable, but at least minimally defensible.

<sup>114</sup> "The Legitimation Crisis of Progressive New Music in the United States: Parts I-II," *op. cit.*

<sup>115</sup> This is an uncredited riff on Robert Hughes's book, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1981, c 1980).

Neoclassicism, its historical reference was not treated ironically and therefore seemed pre-Modernist, yet this was all coming from the hands of a composer Taruskin portrays as an acknowledged Modernist master.

At this point Taruskin employs the confusion in meanings he himself has created in order to win debating points. For example, in pointing out Rochberg's use of a fairly standard post-tonal technique in the first movement, Taruskin writes, "This was a time-tested, everyday—hence conservative—'new music' gambit" (Vol. 5, p. 429), thus presenting Rochberg's return to a tonal style later in the same piece as innovative by comparison.<sup>116</sup> This sort of equivocation is employed tactically by Taruskin throughout the latter part of Vol. 5 in order to portray the post-World War II progressive composers as conservatives in relationship to the innovative neo-tonalists and Postmodernists. Unfortunately, this tactic ignores both content and, in the case of Rochberg's Third String Quartet, context. A time-tested technique in a post-tonal idiom is not necessarily conservative when juxtaposed against a traditional tonal idiom. It was clear at the time Rochberg's Third Quartet was first heard that audiences experienced a sense of recognition, a sort of homecoming, upon hearing the conservative tonal style appear (or perhaps one might call it preservative, as it preserved fairly accurately external characteristics of high-Romantic style). They did not experience this in the post-tonal sections, even though Rochberg was using "time-tested" post-tonal techniques.<sup>117</sup>

At this point (pp. 431-432), in a dramatic coup, Taruskin juxtaposes Rochberg's return to tonality with Leonard Bernstein's concurrent success as an unrepentantly tonal composer: for Rochberg, the use of tonality was the outcome of a stylistic crisis, for Bernstein, "probably the most famous classical musician in the world," p. 431, it was part of a "natural" relationship with his audience. Here we

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<sup>116</sup> In fact, Taruskin's rhetorical tactics unintentionally expose the somewhat musty and academic nature of Rochberg's Modernism. Although Taruskin portrays Rochberg as working at the forefront of Modernism (emphasizing "perpetual technical advance" and "advanced contemporary rhythmic style," pp. 414-415), with several decades' distance it is now clear how derivative Rochberg's post-tonal works were. Taruskin's claim (p. 432) that Rochberg was "universally" acknowledged as a significant *academic* Modernist is a nice rhetorical trick: who could deny this fact, given that Rochberg was a tenured professor at an elite academic institution? But acknowledging this fact says little about Rochberg's significance as a Modernist *composer*, unless one believes that academic departments of music display unerring judgment of compositional quality, which Taruskin clearly does not believe to be the case. Here the dodgy "universal" claim also crumbles, as leading European Modernist composers barely acknowledged Rochberg's music. What is more, many non-academic composers of the period, including many in the United States, viewed precisely this sort of employment of academic credentials in order to enforce consent for a composer's significance with great suspicion.

Rochberg's post-tonal pieces were undoubtedly well-crafted works by a historically-minded academic post-tonal composer. By no stretch of the imagination, though, could they be considered at the forefront of innovative compositional developments of their time.

<sup>117</sup> Another way of viewing this question is to imagine an elderly radical in a far-leftist party calling for the violent overthrow of the government. Within his or her party, this rhetoric may have exhausted its force decades ago, but in the broader society, no one would recognize this appeal as conservative in nature—least of all any serious conservative party.

face one of the most distressing narrative tricks of Taruskin's entire enterprise, in light of the facts (i.e., "true descriptive statements about past events"<sup>118</sup>) that we possess about this period. Tonal composers comprised a clear majority of composers in America throughout this period.<sup>119</sup> The "most famous classical musician in the world" (Bernstein) was a tonal composer. A minority of composers, some in the academy, aimed toward creating new types of music and stopped writing (or never wrote) tonal music. A subset of these, academic serialists, were marginalized everywhere in American academia outside of a few prestige institutions. One of them (Rochberg) broke ranks and started writing tonal music again. Taruskin portrays this event as indicative of a crumbling of the entire Modernist movement, but leaves out of consideration all of the composers who never recognized the supremacy of East Coast serialism, those who continued doing innovative post-tonal work, and those who might not even have known or cared who George Rochberg was. Predictably, although disappointingly, Taruskin jumps onto the side of the overwhelming majority and cheers on the marginalization of the minority.<sup>120</sup>

Rochberg's defection from and angry denunciations of serialism were given great press at the time and are given great space in Taruskin's book. Taruskin describes a parallel event a few years later in the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, the seat of post-World War II progressivism, namely the raucous reception given to Hans Jürgen von Bose's tonal Sonata for Solo Violin, which Taruskin compares to the reception given to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.<sup>121</sup> Taruskin portrays a situation in which the greatest shock of all to the audience would be that of hearing tonal music.

Again, it takes only a few moments of analysis to see through this ruse. Taruskin is describing the shocked reactions (i.e., "the shock of the new") of the relatively small new music audiences in New York and Darmstadt as though they

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<sup>118</sup> Fischer, op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>119</sup> See, for instance, Joseph Straus, op. cit.

<sup>120</sup> Note that on p. 454, second paragraph, Taruskin claims that the "new" point of view, which includes neo-tonalism, Fred Lerdahl's controversial argument for innate limitations on comprehension, and Leonard Meyer's claims for bio-psychological universals (pp. 445-454) "over the course of the century's last decades...gradually assumed dominance," consigning Modernism to the status of "a relic of an outmoded and rightly discredited philosophy of history" (p. 455). Here he clearly sides with the winners of history—as of the early 2000's, when the *Oxford History* was published—and heaps scorn on the losers. On p. 455 he claims that the Modernists practiced "'hegemony,' a system of institutional domination rather than consensus," and on p. 432 he claims that the longstanding influence of the Modernist "master narrative" forced him to neglect tonal composers, as though he, as sole author of his history, had been robbed of all choice in the matter. Beyond the extreme unreliability of the former claim—given that a large majority of the composers in the United States in that period were tonalists and an overwhelming majority of the music played in public was tonal music—it is striking how little interest Taruskin has in protecting minority interests and fostering consensus once his side (i.e., neotonalism) has won.

<sup>121</sup> Taruskin presents an apparent eyewitness account of this event, but provides no footnotes for this account, leaving one to trust him at his word. As has been repeatedly demonstrated in this paper, placing such trust in Taruskin's hands is a perilous decision.

were the reactions of "the audience," i.e., the much larger Classical music audience, which in fact would not have experienced any shock on hearing these tonal works. Yet in the latter part of his history, Taruskin has dismissed the relatively small audiences of new music as insignificant, in that they are not "the audience." This is a clear case of the fallacy of equivocation, as "the audience" is being used to indicate two different audiences. Stravinsky's *Rite* shocked "the audience," but was praised by avant-gardists. Bose and Rochberg shocked the small circles of new music devotees, but their music was accepted by "the audience." The two events are not commensurate. The tonal works of Bose and Rochberg were accepted fairly quickly in those circles that wanted to hear newly-composed tonal music. This is a sociological fact, but it is little more than that. Hundreds of composers were already composing music for these same circles. Perhaps the most striking thing about the neotonalist generation is their shamelessness in appropriating the rhetoric of innovation in order to gain an edge on composers who were already doing what the neotonalists claimed to be inventing.<sup>122</sup>

Taruskin, apparently a diehard Hegelian, wants to turn such facts into historical events, indicative of underlying truths, meanwhile ignoring any facts that conflict with his "number-one postulate" (Vol. 1, p. XV) requiring the termination of Western music. He has employed this wish as a pseudo-warrant,<sup>123</sup> allowing him to fashion a sort of inverted world, in which "progressive" actually means "conservative," and vice versa.<sup>124</sup> This outcome is very likely a direct consequence of his firm belief (again, treated as a warrant but lacking backing) that a return to tonality is an inevitable goal of the long, winding unfolding of reason in history: atonalists were bound to have their errors exposed by history. Of course, as a professed anti-Hegelian, Taruskin cannot accept the notion that reason unfolds in history. But perhaps he believes that as a Postmodernist he is entitled to assume whatever persona he wishes, so long as he ends up riding the winning horse in the historical derby.

It is astonishing, given that his sweeping conclusions concern the entire history and future of the art form, what a narrow perspective Taruskin has chosen for his evidentiary basis, confined by and large to the East Coast university scene where he taught until the mid-1980s. It is equally astonishing that he would believe that East Coast serialists were at the forefront of progress in new music and were racing forward at breakneck speed. What he neglects to acknowledge is that although American academic serialists in the period under discussion (primarily the 1960s through the early 1980s) positioned themselves as the official avant-garde, in fact their conception of material progress tended to be narrowly delimited to a mathematized version of the Schoenbergian serial project, which was by that time

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<sup>122</sup> See Ned Rorem's reactions to neotonalists on p. 431 of Vol. 5.

<sup>123</sup> For this usage of the term "warrant," see Steven Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, c1958). The "backing" required for Taruskin's warrants and conclusions is consistently inadequate.

<sup>124</sup> See G. W. A. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 97-103.

widely viewed in non-American new music circles as an historical relic. Most composers who oriented their efforts toward the avant-garde viewed the East-Coast serialists—rightly or wrongly—as conservative.

During the time period under consideration, most academic faculties were, as now, practically oriented and focused on tonal music.<sup>125</sup> Most tonal composers, both academic and non-academic, and some prominent figures within academic serialism reacted dismissively to experimental composers John Cage and Morton Feldman, avant-gardists such as Pierre Boulez, Iannis Xenakis, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Mauricio Kagel, and just-intonation composers such as Ben Johnston. Precisely at the same time that academic composers such as Rochberg fell off the academic serial bandwagon, viewing its premises as hopelessly avant-gardist, younger composers such as Helmut Lachenmann, Brian Ferneyhough, and Michael Finnissy were pushing against the limitations set by a previous generation of Modernists. One group wanted to go back to what was already known, another to extend the tradition of exploration that has generated much of the innovative music of this last century.

Many of the conflicts that arose within the American academic serial project can be attributed to shortcomings in Modernist conceptions of history and progress. These have often remained, ironically enough, in the Postmodernist-Marxist attempts to overcome Modernism. Each generation of radical Modernists has tended to treat the discoveries of its own generation as the permanent forward edge of progress for the entire art form, long after these discoveries have been assimilated within that community. Taruskin has a valid point in remarking upon the narrow musical world-view of some prominent American academic serialists during the period under discussion; it is also difficult to support the claims made from within this camp that their project represented the forward edge of progress of music as a whole. This was but one musical project, coexisting and competing with several others.

One of the primary aims of a Part IV of this extended essay<sup>126</sup> is to offer a model that conceives of musical progress in non-universal and non-exclusive terms: "progress" can serve as a defensible concept if it is seen as part of the extension of expressive/inflective, formal or integrative potentials within a musical project. The decision to avoid repeating what has already been done does not require a "linear path into the future," but is rather a matter of encouraging composers to individuate and develop their own compositional personalities within the context of a shared, meaningful idiom.<sup>127</sup> In the project of progressive music as

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<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Reich notes that Stockhausen "gave a lecture at Columbia University and they thought the devil had come to town. In those days, Elliott Carter was still regarded by some Juilliard faculty as part of the lunatic fringe, but I was interested in Carter's use of metric modulation."

<sup>126</sup> In preparation, with projected publication in *Search—Journal for New Music and Culture* in 2014.

<sup>127</sup> The validity of this project is questioned by Taruskin in passages such as Vol. 2, pp. 737-739, where he employs the "genetic fallacy abusive" in order to emphasize its accidental beginnings and

I conceive it, listeners are anything but excluded from consideration, as a central imperative for a composer is that of shaping one's expressive aims in a manner that translates into a dramatic musical narrative. But if one objects that not everyone in "the audience" will like it, one could respond that it is impossible to please everyone, even when one aims to do so. After all, even populist composers rarely succeed in pleasing a substantial audience for an extended period; for every Aaron Copland, there are dozens or hundreds of composers who have failed to become audience favorites. A more pertinent reply, however, is that there are many different audiences.

Again, it must be emphasized that there is a tremendous range of tastes in the world. Any serious composer will write for the tastes he or she knows, not for an abstract average of all the tastes that exist. But there is no guarantee that intents and results correspond. Some composers of post-tonal music have attained a fairly wide following, others not, despite a tremendous amount of "elite" backing; the same holds true as well for tonal composers.

For Taruskin, the restoration of consonance/tonality is a necessary step in winning the approval of "the audience," whether or not the approval of "the audience" is in fact won by this restoration; after all, his epic concludes with a tableau of inevitably shrinking audiences for Classical music despite the victory of the neotonalists. One suspects that precisely because new music systems in Central Europe and other regions present counterexamples that would disprove Taruskin's thesis, he must ignore or invalidate them.

Thus, in the last part of his history, in an astonishing act of ethnocentrism, Taruskin covers almost nothing but American music. On pp. XIX-XX of Vol. 5, Taruskin proudly displays his chauvinism with the following statement: "I, of course, acknowledge the obvious prominence of matters American in this account, but it is hardly exaggerated. The United States unquestionably inherited musical leadership during this period from Europe." This assertion is certainly debatable, but it is also ultimately a red herring. Taruskin has claimed to be writing a history of *Western* music, not of American music.<sup>128</sup>

He then proceeds to imply that initial American funding for the Darmstadt festival determined its later developments (yet another appearance of the genetic fallacy), as though post-World War II European avant-garde music was an American invention. This assertion is insupportable if one is speaking about

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its subsequent exploitation in the pernicious project of Classical music: "This was the discourse of 'classical music,' which, when purveyed by concert-giving and educational institutions in the guise of 'music appreciation,' became...the vehicle for the commercial (and, even more covertly, the political) exploitation of a product that was touted precisely as something above commerce and politics" (p. 738). It goes without saying that millions of people have in fact derived something of great benefit from this evil enterprise, which it serves for many involved in the field less as a means of exploiting their fellow humans than as a signal accomplishment in mankind's intellectual and artistic history.

<sup>128</sup> Taruskin had also long ago promised in his Introduction (Vol. 1, p. XIII) an approach that would be "catholic and as near exhaustive as possible."

leading European avant-gardists of the post-World War II period. Can one seriously maintain that composers such as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Helmut Lachenmann, Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, György Ligeti, and Iannis Xenakis were taking the lead in their most radical phases from American avant-garde composers?<sup>129</sup> If this is the case, why has there been a steady stream of North American composers throughout the post-World War II period going to Europe to attend IRCAM and the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, to study with European composers, and to work and live, if they were able, in European countries? Why were so few major European composers in the same period drawn to move to the United States for any other reason than to teach in a university, meanwhile maintaining their compositional careers back in Europe?

Taruskin ignores the fact that the largest public infrastructure for new music in the world exists not in the United States, where it is relatively miniscule, but rather in Europe. He might object that if one includes American universities, then the United States gives a much greater number of concerts of new music than the European Union. However, Taruskin has derided the academic new music scene throughout the last volume of his history, and he has treated public concert life as the central arena of music-making; therefore, I will take him at his word and only discuss the domain of public, non-academic concerts.

In individual countries of the European Union, every year far more adventurous works of new music are publicly performed and publicly broadcast far more often than in the United States, which is somewhat of a backwater by comparison. A single city such as Berlin has more permanent professional orchestras and opera houses than most states in America. One can wait decades in the United States to hear live performances of Modernist masterworks that are repertory items in Central Europe,<sup>130</sup> and newly-composed operas of any ambition, even those by American composers, are far more likely to be premiered and regularly performed in Europe than in the United States.<sup>131</sup> Experimental works by

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<sup>129</sup> Even granted the powerful influence that John Cage had on many European avant-gardists, this influence scarcely defined the course of post-World War II European new music, especially at centers such as IRCAM or the Darmstädter Ferienkurse. What is more, for most Europeans influenced by him, Cage did not represent America as a whole, but rather an anarchic, marginalized aspect of American culture that they valued.

<sup>130</sup> One particularly clear example is the following. Although Los Angeles is the second-largest metropolitan area in the United States and was Arnold Schoenberg's home for the latter part of his life, the Los Angeles premiere of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* did not occur until 2001, a half-century after his death (Alan Rich, "Courage Beyond the Call," *L. A. Weekly*, Dec. 19, 2001, <http://www.laweekly.com/2001-12-27/stage/courage-beyond-the-call/>, accessed July 3, 2013). The poor-man's status of even the most elite cultural institutions in the United States can be judged by the conditions of this epochal performance: it was an unstaged performance, performed by a German orchestra and chorus invited in for the occasion.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), pp. 136-145: despite the extraordinary success of the Metropolitan House production of *Einstein on the Beach* in 1976, "no American company was eager to commission Glass's second opera; in fact, Glass approached the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Opera, and both turned him down. It was left to the Dutch to come to the rescue," (p. 138). This pattern applies as well to an "elite"



composers such as John Cage and Morton Feldman, whose reception history in Taruskin's hands is (for obvious tactical purposes) restricted to sparsely-attended American performances,<sup>132</sup> are regularly performed before large audiences in Europe. For decades European ensembles of new music have taken on far more ambitious challenges than any American ensemble, and many of the finest American new music players now live in Europe. Few if any ensembles in the United States have the deep fund of experience at playing difficult works of several generations of new music that can be found in numerous ensembles in Europe. With a few exceptions, if one wants to hear a high-level large-ensemble performance of the work of nearly any adventurous composer, one must rely on a European ensemble. In short, Taruskin's portrayal of the new music scene does not pass the laugh test.

Owing to Taruskin's "America-first" tunnel vision, the reader ends up missing out not only on the vast majority of new music activities in the world over the last few decades, but also on most of the leading composers of new music.<sup>133</sup> Thus, Helmut Lachenmann, one of the world's most respected avant-garde composers, who is considered somewhat of a father figure in the school of Critical Composition, does not appear in Taruskin's book. The renowned Italian composer Franco Donatoni does not appear in Taruskin's book; Luigi Nono's music is treated cursorily, mainly as a vehicle for Taruskin to dismiss as a whole Nono's life-long aim of composing avant-gardist socially conscious music.<sup>134</sup> The last three decades

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composer such as Elliott Carter, whose only opera was commissioned from and performed by the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, Berlin.

<sup>132</sup> Taruskin on pp. 75-76 of Vol. 5 describes in detail the hostile reception in Los Angeles to John Cage's *Atlas eclipticus*, and on p. 101 he cites Paul Griffiths' description of a performance of Morton Feldman's *For Philip Guston*, for whose entire four-hour duration only about a dozen people remained. These serve as opportunities for him to parody the pretensions to sacralization in Modernism, claiming, "The avant-garde had become a conservative faction, perhaps...the most reactionary faction of them all" (p. 101). One must note that "the avant-garde" has shifted meaning yet again, now very nearly to the point of absurdity. If the "true" avant-garde is dedicated to combating yesterday's modernism (Vol. 5, p. 367), then Feldman and Cage did not belong to *this* avant-garde. Taruskin seems to believe that they belonged to *another* avant-garde, one that was "conservative" and "reactionary." But if two avant-gardes of a radically different nature coexist, then it is obviously nonsensical to speak of "the avant-garde."

More importantly, in political theory, "conservative" and "avant-garde" are considered mutually exclusive. In addition, "reactionary" cannot automatically be considered equivalent to "conservative," as reaction is not simply an intensification of "conserving" core of conservatism. In fact, conservatism and reaction, for all their affinities, tend to be grounded on different conceptions of history, the one favoring preservation of existing customs and slow change, the other favoring a radical break with modern tendencies in order to return to an imagined past.

<sup>133</sup> The following information is based on the Indexes to the last two volumes.

<sup>134</sup> See Vol. 5, pp. 88-89. Taruskin's treatment of Nono is mendacious to an extreme degree, very likely because granting any social efficacy to Nono's socially-oriented music would undermine Taruskin's essentialist link between tonality and "the audience" (i.e., as representing society as a whole). For example, Taruskin states that "He [Nono] never recognized a contradiction between his musical idiom, which appealed only to an elite coterie, and his commitment to egalitarian politics." This is a clear example of circular reasoning: Taruskin assumes what he needs to prove, namely

of Harrison Birtwhistle's successful career as one of the leading British Modernist composers are ignored. Wolfgang Rihm, the dominant German composer of the last few decades, whose operas are performed throughout Germany, is mentioned in passing only once.<sup>135</sup> The Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, one of the most successful living European composers, does not appear in Taruskin's book. Toru Takemitsu, perhaps the leading post-World War II Japanese composer, does not appear in Taruskin's book. The leading Swiss composers Frank Martin, Heinz Holliger, and Klaus Huber do not appear in Taruskin's book. The Hungarian composer György Kurtág, widely viewed as one of the greatest living composers, does not appear in Taruskin's book. The Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski does not appear in Taruskin's book. The list of notable composers not even mentioned by Taruskin is extensive: Jean Barraqué, Emmanuel Nunes, Luc Ferrari, Salvatore Sciarrino, Vinko Globokar, Mauricio Kagel, Alberto Ginastera, Mario Lavista, Julio Estrada, Joji Yuasa, Toshio Hosokawa, Toshio Mayazumi, and so forth. This list covers only the most distinguished older composers; predictably, Taruskin does not discuss a single major avant-garde composer of art music born within a half-century or more. If one were seeking information about the field of new music, this

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both that there was such a contradiction and that Nono's music only appealed to an elite coterie. First, Nono's works were being regularly performed in large public political meetings and festivals, not just for elite coteries, so Taruskin is the one who needs to demonstrate, not just assert, that they were not effective for the purposes for which they were intended. Second, the wide diffusion and intense international reception of Nono's late works demonstrate that Taruskin's claim that they "only appealed to an elite coterie" is inaccurate.

Taruskin goes on to emphasize the fact that although Nono was a member of the Italian Communist Party Central Committee, "his music was of a kind anathematized in the Soviet Union." Interestingly, Taruskin neglects the fact that during this same period Nono's music was also effectively blacklisted and rarely performed in the center of the free world, the United States. He cannot resist noting that "Nono defended his musical idiom in terms borrowed from Adorno, another Marxist who turned a blind eye to the actual historical consequences of Marxist philosophy." The aim here is obviously to paint both as hypocrites, but especially in this case, the desire to unmask his foes has revealed a shocking degree of amateurishness for a historian of Taruskin's reputation. A few minutes of research would turn up ample evidence, for instance, of Adorno's criticisms of Communism. See, for example, Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin, eds., *Adorno: a Critical Reader* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), p. 180: "Adorno had few qualms about writing for *Der Monat* and saw it as an opportunity to assert his anti-communist credentials"; "He called Lukács a 'dogmatic...commissar of culture"; "Adorno's anti-communism was not simply the product of the Cold War consensus that faced West Germany"; and "Upon returning to West Germany, Adorno's political engagement thus assumed the form of a sociological activism that relied on empirical methods that he brought back like souvenirs from America."

On these two pages of Taruskin's text alone, a fairly cursory investigation into the factual basis underlying his stylish, brisk prose reveals slipshod historical research, clearly slanted reporting, sloppy reasoning, and a fundamental logical mistake. If these sorts of errors are hiding under the surface of every page of Taruskin's epic, one shudders at the degree of misinformation that might be packed into his 4,000-page epic.

<sup>135</sup> Wolfgang Rihm is only mentioned in conjunction with Helmut Rilling's Passion project, whose contributing composers were drawn from numerous countries. Predictably, in Taruskin's portrayal, a composer trained and then residing in the United States "stole the show."

supposedly authoritative history could be used as a sort of anti-encyclopedia: what is excluded is far more significant than what is included.

One of the clearest examples of Taruskin's blindered perspective can be seen on p. 454, where he claims that "Especially in America...*virtually all* [added emphasis] the emerging talents in the last two decades of the century were 'neotonalists.'" He then provides a lengthy list of neotonalist composers. The warrant for his claim is that many of these composers have won the Pulitzer Prize or the Grawemeyer Award, both conservative high-profile American awards. His standards for measuring the significance of American composers have clearly altered from those in the first 400-some pages, in which, excepting Elliott Carter and Charles Ives, he almost exclusively discusses composers who did *not* win the Pulitzer Prize (the Grawemeyer Prize was only instituted in 1985). Taruskin has apparently forgotten that neither Milton Babbitt nor any composer of the American experimental school—the main subjects for two substantial chapters—won either of these prizes.<sup>136</sup>

Why would Taruskin apparently view recent Pulitzer Prize awards as a more significant indicator of compositional significance than those awarded earlier? Perhaps the significant change in the criteria for Pulitzer awards since

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<sup>136</sup> However, the music of the distinguished American composer Donald Martino, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1974, is omitted from this history. Martino's name is mentioned only in relationship to a composers' organization, and in the Index he appears with the first name of "David."

Although not every composer can be included in such a volume, in this case the reason appears fairly obvious: despite his claim to even-handed treatment of composers (in the Introduction to Vol. 1, p. XIV), Taruskin clearly did not consider Martino to be "important" enough to merit discussion. In 1996 Taruskin delivered a brutally dismissive public broadside against Martino in the *New York Times* ("How Talented Composers Become Useless," March 10, 1996). Taruskin's presentation was typically unreliable, in this case owing to its reliance on the "straw man" fallacy. The main target of this article was clearly Milton Babbitt's aesthetic position, which Taruskin falsely attributed to Martino. In the article, Taruskin lectured Martino on the significance of the tonal system to coherent musical expression, incorrectly assuming that coherent expression is not possible without tonality. He was apparently unaware that in addition to being an outstanding twelve-tone composer, Martino was also an accomplished jazz performer and a widely-performed tonal composer. It is also clear from the respect accorded him by his professional peers that Martino was no longer merely "talented," but was instead considered highly accomplished. The "useless" epithet chosen by Taruskin was clearly a subjective—and gratuitously nasty—assessment. It was apparently based on Martino's age at the time and Taruskin's perception that his style of composition was outmoded, a "wasm" in the amusing opening sentence of the article: "The nice thing about anism, someone once observed, is how quickly it becomes a wasm."

Throughout the article, Taruskin employed the standard rhetorical figures of progressive temporality, mocking Andrew Porter's praise in the 1970's of Martino's Piano Sonata as "a sign of times gone by," drawing attention to the "'post-modern' demise of Serialism," and condemning Martino in quasi-Marxist fashion: "Composers like Mr. Martino are still miseducating their pupils just as he was miseducated himself, dooming them to uselessness." In retrospect, it is amusing to note the degree to which Taruskin was unaware that his triumphal attitude toward an older composer was an "ism" of mid-1990s New Musicology that has not aged gracefully into "wasm" status.

1992—about which Taruskin has not informed the reader—has something to do with this. In that year, the Pulitzer Jury, which had chosen the older Modernist Ralph Shapey for the award, was overruled by the Pulitzer Board. The official justification of the Board's decision included the following statement: "Pulitzers are enhanced by having, in addition to the professional's point of view, the layman's or consumer's point of view,"<sup>137</sup> a statement that is very much in accord with Taruskin's "audience-response" credo. The practical meaning of the Pulitzer Board's decision, if I may be allowed a paraphrase, was roughly the following: "progressively-oriented composers who do not meet a high level of audience approval will no longer receive the award. If the jury of professional musicians appointed by the board chooses a composer that the board does not approve of, then the jury will be overruled." It is thus fairly clear why progressive composers have largely vanished from the list of Pulitzer Prize winners, whose ranks are now almost without exception filled with more conservative (albeit very fine) composers. Taruskin takes these skewed results as revelation of a fundamental truth.

Somehow, in this discussion Taruskin has forgotten to make any mention of the majority of the leading composition prizes in the world; perhaps the reason might have been that most of these do not in general choose American tonal composers as prizewinners. For example, how could the author have forgotten to mention the Ernst von Siemens Musikpreis, a prize that is far more prestigious on an international level than the American Pulitzer Prize? How could he have neglected to mention that excepting Benjamin Britten and Leonard Bernstein, *all* of the composers who have won the Siemens prize could reasonably have been considered progressive in their own time, and none are or were neotonalists?

It is deeply disturbing to witness the degree of chauvinism and willful ignorance exhibited by the author of the *Oxford History of Western Music*. He appears to have attended few live performances of adventurous new music in central Europe; with few exceptions, only second-hand descriptions are provided. Did it ever occur to Taruskin that his claims concerning the lack of an audience for new music might be rendered objectively false once he had experienced a large audience sitting in rapt attention through an hours-long Morton Feldman piece, or bursting into deeply-felt applause and sustained standing ovations after the performance of a "noisy," difficult work by Helmut Lachenmann, or erupting into shouts of praise after a performance of a new work by Elliott Carter?

One of the most extreme examples of Taruskin's attempt to twist the historical record in order to portray Modernism as vanishing and neotonalism as all-triumphant appears in his discussion of the New Complexity (Vol. 5, pp. 475-476). Here his research is particularly slipshod, confined mostly to the disputed "Complexity Forum" in the academic American journal, *Perspectives of New Music*;<sup>138</sup> he has apparently not bothered to consult primary sources and a

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<sup>137</sup> See <http://www1.american.edu/heintze/Pul1.htm>, accessed July 3, 2013.

<sup>138</sup> Vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter, 1994).

substantial literature—much of it in English—published outside of the United States.<sup>139</sup> Taruskin claims, for example, that the manifestos of the New Complexity are "unprintable in a book like this" (p. 475), but if this implies an obscene or scatological content, it is demonstrably false. With regard to the *New Perspectives* "Complexity Forum," Taruskin boldly proclaims that "Nobody took the 'new' in New Complexity seriously," but this judgment can only be correct first if one ignores the fact that most of those who did take the New Complexity seriously were not included in the *Perspectives* forum, and second if one accepts Taruskin's apparent belief that people who do not share his opinion are "nobodies."<sup>140</sup> At any rate, he has stacked the deck by refusing to acknowledge the existence of dozens of articles and dozens of progressive composers influenced by the New Complexity.

Regarding the forbidding notation of New Complexity music, Taruskin makes the beginner's mistake of assuming a direct and necessary relationship between notational task and listener perception, without understanding that a skilled composer can create compelling processual transformations that can be dramatically effective even if the performer does not play every notated indication "perfectly" or the listener does not perceptually grasp every distinction.<sup>141</sup> Taruskin

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<sup>139</sup> For example, before publication of the revised edition of the *Oxford History*, Taruskin appears not to have perused any of the first three volumes of the book series, *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century* (eds. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig [Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 1999-present]).

Two decades ago I repeatedly attempted to inform Taruskin about some of the younger New Complexity composers such as Klaus K. Hübler, Richard Barrett, and Roger Redgate, prizewinners at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, but his responses, which I have held on to, were uniformly negative. One short note in particular summed up his attitude: "I don't know any of your friends." Thus, Taruskin attempted to disqualify, sight-unseen, the music of composers he assumed were my friends, even though he had no evidence that they were indeed my friends (although I have great respect for the music of these composers, none is a personal friend of mine). His response clearly gives the lie to the claim in his Introduction (Vol. 1, p. XIV) that "I never asked myself whether this or that composition or musician was 'worth mentioning.'" Taruskin was confronted with information about composers who had achieved some renown in the new-music system. He apparently decided that these composers were not "worth mentioning," and then claimed in the Introduction to his history that he never made such a decision.

<sup>140</sup> The "Complexity Forum" in *Perspectives of New Music* was not viewed as a fair and informed treatment of the subject by most composers associated with the New Complexity. It was the cause of great frustration for at least one of the editors sympathetic to the New Complexity, and at least one editor, Jerome Kohl (in the "Discussion" section of the Wikipedia entry on "New Complexity," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:New\\_Complexity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:New_Complexity), accessed July 3, 2013), insisted, *pace* Taruskin, that the "New Complexity" was not in fact the main subject of the "Complexity Forum." This could possibly explain the fact that most of the article submissions by composers closely associated with the New Complexity did not appear in the Complexity Forum.

Although Richard Barrett objected to the term "New Complexity" on quite different grounds than did Taruskin, the rejection of his article that had been requested for the "Complexity Forum" led him to charge the journal with practicing censorship; see "Tracts for Our Times?" *The Musical Times*, Vol. 139, No. 1864 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 21-24, esp. p. 23.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Stuart Paul Duncan, "To Infinity and Beyond: A Reflection on Notation, 1980s Darmstadt, and Interpretational Approaches to the Music of New Complexity" *Search—Journal for New Music and Culture*, Issue 7 (Summer 2010), <http://searchnewmusic.org/index7.html>, accessed

is clearly out of his element here, has not read the relevant literature, and has not listened to expert performances of this music carefully. Certainly it is not asking too much for Taruskin to acknowledge the respect that a composer such as Brian Ferneyhough has achieved on an international level (for example, as recipient of the Siemens Musikpreis, 2007). Is it credible that all who have been fascinated by his music were power-mad "elites," or dazed admirers incoherently "baffled" (as Taruskin incorrectly claims was the case for admirers of Carter's music, Vol. 5, p. 301) by the notational complexity of the music?

No matter how much evidence might contradict his story line, Taruskin has nevertheless chosen to prophecy the end of the art form and help bring this end to fruition through his advocacy.<sup>142</sup> On the last page of his epic, Vol. 5, p. 528, he presents a closing tableau with a "thinning faction of traditional modernists, mostly aging but not without younger recruits." It appears that most of the hundreds of progressively-oriented composers at work today have been carefully airbrushed out

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July 3, 2013; and Frank Cox, "Notes Toward a Performance Practice for Complex Music," Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig, eds., *Polyphony & Complexity*, New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century, Vol. 1 (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2002), pp. 70-132.

<sup>142</sup> As he ends his epic and finishes off Western art music, Taruskin manages to commit an especially gratuitous act of ethnocentrism. During one of the greatest expansions of Western musical literacy in its history, namely the training of millions of young musicians of Asian background over the last generation, Taruskin can only see a decay of musical literacy. He asserts, "Very few, especially in America, now learn musical notation as part of their general education. The lowered cultural prestige of literate musical genres has accompanied the marginalization of musical literacy and abetted it..." (p. 510). Thus, because he believes that American standards for musical literacy are set very low, and because "[t]he United States unquestionably inherited musical leadership" (Vol. 5, p. XIX), the entire world must necessarily follow the American lead into lower standards of musical literacy. He maintains this in defiance of the demonstrable fact that certain countries are moving in a diametrically opposite direction, i.e., toward higher standards and broader reach of musical literacy.

Perhaps Taruskin should step out of the academic bubble in which he is living and face reality. The United States is no longer unquestionably the musical leader of the world, if indeed it ever was. A country such as Germany has throughout the entire post-World War II period maintained a far greater density of full-time professional orchestras, opera houses, high-level music festivals, and the like than the United States has ever seen. Certainly in the fields of both early music and innovative new music, there is little doubt that the European Union has won and maintained leadership. In the field of Classical music, millions of young musicians who value musical literacy are being trained outside of the United States, and Asian countries are now producing many of the leading performers in the world.

What is more, the situation for Western Classical music in many regions of the United States is far less dire than what appears in Taruskin's portrayal. Fortunately, the hundreds of thousands of American musicians still committed to teaching and practicing the art form of Western music have not yet acknowledged that their efforts are in vain. Less fortunately, their attempts to instill in young musicians a respect for the special values that the Western musical tradition offers face an obstacle presented by the *Oxford History of Western Music*, whose central premise is, in essence, a wish by its author that this tradition be terminated.

of the picture.<sup>143</sup> Taruskin's "truth" simply does not correspond to what most informed and ethically inclined people would consider truth.

At the conclusion of Taruskin's universal history, we see the realized end of history: a panorama of the self-indulgent, ephemeral sensations of the 90s and 00s, endlessly recycling the past, already disappearing from the memory of current audiences, yet posited, through inclusion in the *Oxford History*, as possessing enduring cultural worth. Taruskin's previously sharp analytical insights have dissolved by the end of his mammoth opus into enthusiastic chatter difficult to distinguish from publicity slogans. Having abolished any serious discussion of ambitious, innovative music from the last few decades—indeed, having abolished most progressively-oriented composers—the triumph of tonality, music consumers, and accessibility that Taruskin offers as a final flourish of the Western tradition before its dissolution appears rather empty. Modernist and progressive music at least offer possible futures, but the spectacle Taruskin presents is that of a society so concerned with portraying itself as the already-realized future that nothing not already known can fit within its cosmos.<sup>144</sup>

Although a sort of pluralism is evident in Taruskin's selection of examples, it is by and large a pluralism of dead ends. However, the *Oxford History*, despite Taruskin's best efforts, will not succeed in closing out the art form. Future musicians will likely be baffled by the shortsightedness it embodies, by the lack of promising perspectives offered by the "avant-garde" Taruskin has anointed, and by the eagerness with which he has attempted to stifle innovative visions that might enrich a later generation. Taruskin's promise for the future is little more than a resort to foggy myth-making, projecting onto succeeding generations his imagined restoration of an invented past.

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<sup>143</sup> The "younger recruits" to modernism whose existence Taruskin might deign to acknowledge would probably be consigned to the "traditional modernist" camps of either Babbitt or Carter, despite the fact that the influence of either is extremely small among younger progressively-oriented composers. It is obvious that Taruskin cannot make sense of compositional developments that do not fit within his decades-old made-in-America templates.

<sup>144</sup> Note the title of the penultimate chapter: "After Everything."