

BERKSHIRE JAZZ SOCIETY

BOX 661

PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01201



MR. ROYAL HARTIGAN
1068 NORTH ST.
PITTSFIELD MA.0 1201

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN ALEATORIC MUSIC

THE TRADITION OF WORLD ART AS SERIOUS HUMAN EXPRESSION HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS, THAT IS, MEN HAVE ENGAGED IN THE CREATIVE ACT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL AND TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVES. THE PHYSICAL SENSES, AS WELL AS THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM AND OTHER HIGHER NEUROLOGICAL CENTERS WHICH RELATE TO REASON AND EMOTIVE RESPONSES, ARE FUNCTIONALLY INFLUENCED BY TECHNOLOGIES AND CULTURES ENVIRONMENTAL TO THEM, ALTERING BOTH THEIR SENSITIVITY AND INTERRELATION. THUS, EXTENSIONS OF HUMAN CAPACITIES, SUCH AS TOOLS, FIRE, THE WHEEL, PAPER, PRINTING, ELECTRICITY, RADIO, TELEVISION, ATOMIC POWER, AS WELL AS THE VALUES INHERENT IN ANY CULTURE, CAUSE CHANGES IN THE SENSORY LIFE AND AESTHETIC AWARENESS OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN VARIOUS TIMES AND PLACES. THESE TECHNOLOGICAL-SENSORY RATIOS I. E., TACTILE, OLFACTORY, VISUAL, AUDITORY, AND SO FORTH-CONSTITUTE THE SOURCE FROM WHICH THE ART OF ANY GIVEN AREA OR PERIOD FLOWS.

PRE-1900 WESTERN EUROPEAN ART EXHIBITS A STRONGLY VISUAL IMPACT WITH ITS RESULTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF LINEARITY, PERCEPTIVE OBJECTIVITY, AND SEQUENTIAL ORDER. ARISTOTELIAN LOGIC, MEANS, ENDS, AND SO ON, BETRAYING A ONE DIMENSIONAL, RATIONAL THEOLOGICAL WORLDVIEW. MUCH OF THE ART OF ASIA, AFRICA, AND LATIN AMERICA, AS WELL AS CONTEMPORARY WESTERN, EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA, REFLECT A MORE BALANCED INTERPLAY AMONG THE SENSES WITH AN EMPHASIS UPON TACTILE AND AUDITORY VALUES, E. G., NON-OR MULTI-LINEARITY, HIGH PERSPECTIVE INVOLVEMENT, NON-SEQUENTIALISM, SPONTANEITY, ALL-AT-ONCENESS, AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL SPACE.

WHEREAS THE VISUAL NOTION OF TIME AND MOVEMENT IS SINGULAR, LINEAR, SEQUENTIAL, CASUALLY CONNECTED, AND ORDERED FROM BEGINNING THROUGH MIDDLE TO END OR CLIMAX, THE TACTILE/AUDITORY PERSPECTIVE STRESSES PLURALITY, NONSEQUENCE, DIVERSITY, JUXTAPOSITION, AND INTEGRATION. SIMILARLY, THE VISUAL CONCEPT OF SPACE IS ENCLOSED, UNIFORM, CONTINUOUS, AND NEWTONIAN OR AT LEAST EUCLIDEAN, WHILE TACTILE/AUDITORY SPACE IS OPEN, NON-CONTINUOUS, AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL.

THESE CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES HAVE EFFECTS IN THE NATURE OF THE MUSICS OF ANY CULTURE. TRADITIONAL WESTERN MUSIC REVEALS A RIGIDITY OF PRECONCEPTION, CONTENT,

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AND PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIVE OF THE FIXED VISUAL POINT OF VIEW IN A UNIVERSE KNOWABLE, FINITE, ONE AND UNCHANGING, CHARACTERISTICS NOT UNRELATED TO THOSE PREDICTABLE IN FAYOLA, TOP FORTY, AIRPORT, ELEVATOR, SUPERMARKET, MASS, AND UTILITARIAN MUSIC.

MUCH OF THE TRADITIONAL ASIAN, AFRICAN, LATIN AMERICAN, AS WELL AS CONTEMPORARY WESTERN, MUSIC SEES THE MOMENT OF THE CREATIVE ACT AS SUPREME, THUS THE ELEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION OR IMPROVISATION BECOMES CENTRAL, ALLOWING THE MUSIC TO LIVE AND GROW IN ITS PERFORMANCE. THESE ARE AUDITORY/TACTILE VALUES AND ASSUME NO POINT OF VIEW IN A UNIVERSE MAGICAL, ULTIMATELY UNKNOWABLE, INFINITE, AND CONSTANTLY CHANGING.

THE NEW MUSIC WHICH HAS GROWN FROM WHAT HAS BEEN TRADITIONALLY REFERRED TO AS JAZZ HAS ITS ROOTS IN AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA AND ASIA, AND HAS MERGED WITH WESTERN INFLUENCES TO COMPRISE AN ART FORM WITH OPENNESS TO ASSIMILATE THE EFFECTS OF FUTURE TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE FERTILITY TO ENCOURAGE INNOVATION, AND THE DYNAMISM TO TRANSCEND THE POSSIBLE.

ROYAL HARTIGAN

THIS ESSAY HAS BEEN THE FIRST OF WHAT WE HOPE WILL BE A REGULAR FEATURE IN THE NEWSLETTER. ANYONE INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING ARTICLES, REVIEW ETC. PLEASE MAIL THEM TO THE BERKSHIRE JAZZ SOCIETY PO BOX 661 PITTSFIELD MA. 01201.

ROYAL HARTIGAN IS ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE BJS. HE IS A DRUMMER AND PIANIST. HE HOLDS A DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY FROM ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE, HE SERVED TWO YEARS WITH THE PEACE CORPS IN THE PHILIPPINES. ROYAL HAS STUDIED WITH ARCHIE SHEPP AND MAX ROACH IN THE JAZZ WORK SHOP PROGRAM AT THE UNIV. OF MASS.