

JONATHAN R. PIESLAK

The challenges of plurality within contemporary composition

IN HIS CRITIQUE of contemporary musical research, *Decentering music*, Kevin Korsyn suggests that the disciplines of historical musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory are confronting a crisis of discourse, one in which the language of musical scholarship 'must be understood not merely as a vehicle for information, nor even as a matter of style, but primarily as a social activity, as a force that joins individuals together or divides them, that creates possibilities for identification, and that transmits values and ideals, fantasy and desire'.¹ In many ways, *Decentering music* is a second-order analysis of the language of musical research and demonstrates, also, how that language is dramatically influenced by professional associations and universities, which themselves have come under 'complex historical changes such as globalisation and the commodification of knowledge'.² As I read the opening chapter, 'Musical research in crisis', it seemed to me that aspects of Korsyn's analytical perspective readily lend themselves to a similar examination of the field of music composition; many of the difficulties and trends that Korsyn identifies within this chapter as impacting musical research, such as the division of the field into antagonistic factions and rival groups, the increasing emphasis on professionalisation, and the role of academic and professional institutions, seem to be similar influences on contemporary classical composition. One particular point that he makes is that the crisis of discourse involving historical musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory is, in part, a crisis of identity.³ This immediately brought to mind the question: what is contemporary composition's identity?

While composers and music scholars would, naturally, have a wide variety of responses and conflicting arguments regarding this question, I think they would most likely agree that a distinctive feature of the early 21st-century world is that no point in history has experienced such a diversity of compositional styles. Arnold Whittall effectively describes this as 'contemporary music's search for firmer ground as the topic of what might constitute a mainstream at a time of persistent stylistic plurality seems increasingly salient'.⁴ Is there a sound, style or composer truly defining the present time? When we consider that in 1993 Wolfgang Rihm's *Dritte Musik*, Arvo Pärt's *Litany*, and Michael Daugherty's *Elvis everywhere* were composed, plurality may be what defines the current state of classical composition: the field cannot be characterised by a single composer or style who represents a compositional 'mainstream', and therein lies 'who we are' for composers. But even if

1. Kevin Korsyn: *Decentering music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.5.

2. Korsyn: *Decentering music*, p.1.

3. Korsyn: *Decentering music*, p.18.

4. Arnold Whittall: 'Problems of reference: celebrating 2004', in *The Musical Times* (Autumn 2004), p.27.

we decide to accept plurality as a suitable description of contemporary composition's identity (and most composers and music scholars appear to agree, to varying degrees, that this is the case), one of the next logical steps might be to examine how this plurality manifests itself within the discipline. Korsyn suggests a crisis of discourse confronting the language of musical research. Does, then, plurality constitute a challenge or crisis facing the field of contemporary composition?

A crisis seems to imply a situation in need of resolution and one could object that, in conceptual terms, plurality is not synonymous with crisis. In contemplating this issue, I think it is important to remember that each of the different groups involved in compositional plurality shares a common symbolic space as composers of new music, and is forced to interact socially and politically, within and outside of academia and in many other ways, with each other. While plurality as a concept does not appear to necessitate crisis, the repercussions of plurality in practice can create immense challenges, the consequences of which I hope to reveal in the following pages. My intention is not to unpack the theoretical idea of plurality as it relates to contemporary composition, nor to trace the historical developments that led to the plurality of the present era, but to examine the field of music composition in very practical terms. Much in the spirit of Fredric Jameson's assessment of postmodernism ('theorizing its own conditions of possibility'), I should like to start by analysing contemporary composition's 'understanding of itself' through the examination of underlying, and often unspoken, conditions involved in the plurality that structures the field, and then examine how these conditions are manifest in, and actively influence, music composition at the beginning of the 21st century.⁵

WHEN I refer to plurality, or the diversity of styles, I am suggesting that compositions tend to be differentiated or categorised based on the widely varying aesthetic perspectives or backgrounds that produced them. Consider the following two pieces: Elliott Carter's *Second String Quartet* and Krystof Penderecki's *Threnody* (both composed in 1959). These works can be distinguished on a rather elevated conceptual level: the first piece is the sound of music and the second is the music of sound. Then, of course, pieces can be further divided and categorised within one of these two conceptual groups. If we choose the conceptual context of the sound of music, we have the polarity of tonal and post-tonal/atonal. The same type of process might be applied to the three pieces mentioned in the second paragraph: Daugherty and Pärt have radically different languages, but they are largely tonal, which gives them common ground when compared to Rihm. However, Rihm, Daugherty, and Pärt can become bedfellows – albeit very strange ones – when Penderecki's piece is introduced. And there seems to be

5. Fredric Jameson:
*Postmodernism or, the cultural
logic of late capitalism*
(Durham: Duke University
Press, 1999), p.xi.

an almost countless abundance of names to go along with these categories: minimalism, new complexity, serial, the neo movements, the 'tonalisms', and so forth. It appears that plurality within music composition might be structured according to a type of hierarchy whereby connections and differentiations between works can be made on a variety of levels which, to a certain degree, represents 'the irresolvable struggle of the contemporary to name itself'.⁶

This is important for a number of reasons. First, composers regularly engage in this type of categorisation; in fact, composers are largely responsible for creating and perpetuating the list of genres and subgenres used to describe the plurality within the discipline. This is not an externally imposed method of grouping pieces but, rather, the way the field has chosen to divide and label itself. Second, and more importantly, plurality is an active system of individual identification. Composers and their works are often linked to other composers and works based on stylistic similarities. If 'who we are' – composition's identity – as an historical era is plurality, then the 'who I am' of individual identity for a composer tends to be determined by associations with like-minded composers, on the one hand, or differences with composers who write music from alternate viewpoints, on the other. This can have very significant consequences because the larger groups or styles within which one establishes individual identity seem to represent more than just labels or categories: they can be seen as powerful indicators of what the composer finds artistically valuable and relevant.

Within today's plurality, composition is often not merely the act of writing music, which might then be recognised according to its creative influences. A musical work can suggest a variety of social, political, economic, gender, racial and sexual beliefs, and it can do so whether the composer wants it to or not.⁷ By way of analogy, it is like receiving a voter registration card and being asked to select a party affiliation: Democrat, Republican, Libertarian and so on are not simply brands of political party but indicators of ethics and principles. Even if a choice is made not to register with a party, a lack of affiliation symbolises a rejection of certain values and ideals.

Consider again Rihm's *Dritte Musik* and Daugherty's *Elvis everywhere*. Even a brief fragment of music can conjure up a variety of descriptions or labels for the two pieces, and my point is not so much that composers agree Rihm's piece to be more 'serious' and 'academic', and Daugherty's 'popular' and 'iconographic', but that the distinction between these works can be made in terms that seem to operate as powerful indicators of beliefs, backgrounds, and artistic value and relevance.

At this point an objection might be raised: that I am making a mountain out of a molehill. Terms like these are used to describe pieces because plurality implicitly suggests differences, but saying 'I am a minimalist' or 'I am

6. Bill Readings & Bennet Schaber: 'The question mark in the midst of modernity', in *Postmodernism across the ages*, edd. Bill Readings & Bennet Schaber (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), p.3.

7. Nadine Hubbs's book, *The queer composition of America's sound: gay modernists, American music, and national identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), offers a study of the idea that musical styles can act as indicators of sexual inclination.

an atonalist' or writing an 'academic' piece is not severely loaded with meaning. Furthermore, composers can choose to engage in this type of categorisation or not, and even if they do, they will interpret these types of labels or categories in varying ways, so the same description may mean different things to different people.

This is a good point, and I agree that saying something like 'that was a neo-Romantic piece' may carry with it vastly different associations, if any at all, for different composers. I still think, however, that the words composers use to describe or categorise pieces can have strong implications, even if they are not the same for everyone. Let us return, for example, to one of the words used in the objection, 'academic', as composers tend to use it quite frequently in their language and labelling of works.

THIS begs the question: what is 'academic' music? And if there is such a thing as 'academic' music, then there must be music that sounds 'non-academic'. How do we tell them apart? 'Academic' may mean different things to different people, but for some composers the identification of 'academic' music carries with it a number of very negative connotations, such as inaccessible, mathematical, ivory tower and theoretical. Describing music as 'academic' could mean that what the composer finds valuable and relevant is a mathematically- and theoretically-derived compositional process, and this implies that only specialised music theorists have the ability to access and understand the music. Even worse, it suggests that the process is more important than the product: or, in other words, how the music was manufactured outweighs how it sounds. In describing a piece as 'academic' one can almost immediately introduce the tensions and animosities that exist between the fields of composition and music theory, and there are enormous differences between composition and theory in terms of what each field regards as significant and worthwhile. Consider that in the past 15 years three major theory journals (*Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Analysis*, and *The Journal of Music Theory*) have published only eleven articles out of a total 331 that directly analyse music by living composers. While I fully admit that not all of the terms we might use operate in the same way or to the same degree, I have tried to show that certain descriptions, categories and labels have the potential to signify more than brands within the diversity of styles; they may be indicators of backgrounds, beliefs and principles of artistic value with, as we will see, distinct consequences in the practical aspects of the discipline.

The idea that different styles embody different values has powerful repercussions. As suggested earlier, plurality itself does not necessitate crisis, but some of the ways in which individual composers and groups of composers united by similar creative influences interact seem not to represent a mutual understanding of a diversity of perspectives but a web of rival

factions engaged in us versus them antagonistic behaviour and 'social conflictuality to more and more numerous relations'.⁸ Before I engage with these ideas as they relate to composition any further, allow me to say that the specific names of people, institutions and organisations are not important here; so I have intentionally left them out and, considering the sensitive nature of some of the remarks, I do not feel that it serves any constructive purpose to include them. I hope the reader will trust the accuracy of my citations without specific reference to the 'who's' of many statements.

KORSYN believes that the factions of historical musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory 'embrace radically different values, treating each other with contempt, or sometimes with a bland tolerance that is a mask for indifference'.⁹ This is a particularly insightful statement because it distinguishes two separate viewpoints, 'contempt' and 'tolerance', and this seems to accurately and concisely depict plurality as a system of interactions and behaviour in composition. Composers within certain factions do tend to 'treat each other with contempt', and I am interpreting 'contempt' as any behaviour that privileges one's aesthetic preference. A well-known composer, for example, once asked a student who was considering graduate studies at a university: 'why would you want to go study with those entertainers?' Meanwhile, one of those 'entertainers' uttered in disbelief to their graduate seminar: 'can you believe people still write music like that?' Or at a recent composer's conference, a group of young composers giggled and made faces at one another during the performance of a new work, which was written in a contrasting style than the one they seemed to support; the professor who chastised them did so with a sly smile, scolding them for their lack of professionalism but almost reassuring them that the music lacked serious consideration and was, indeed, laughable.

I believe that these are not isolated incidents. On the contrary, I think every composer can recall instances such as the ones I am citing, where composers engage in behaviour that serves to elevate their own stance at the expense of another. Not only does this encourage overt animosities, but it seems to create a situation where factions become self-perpetuating, trying to implant ideas of superiority within the minds of composers – especially younger ones – in order to 'insure the perpetuation of its own distinct social structure'.¹⁰ And it certainly does not end here. Immense power struggles exist between composers who make decisions regarding awards, commissions, concert programming, and so forth – decisions that profoundly impact professional development and accomplishment. In the past year there have been numerous online discussions where composers accused one another of being awarded prizes in national competitions solely based on the influential membership of their former teachers or friends on the adjudication

8. Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe: *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics* (London: Verso, 1985), pp.159–60.

9. Korsyn: *Decentering music*, p.145.

10. Kay Kaufman Shelemay: 'Crossing boundaries in music and musical scholarship: a perspective from ethnomusicology', in *Musical Quarterly* 80 no.1 (Spring 1996), p.19.

committees. Even if these accusations were unfounded, there is a strong perception that affiliations with certain composers and their respective styles can bring about professional success regardless of the quality of one's music, and this can have rather damaging consequences as composers might attempt to write music, or adapt their pieces, based on what selected, high-profile composers or adjudication committees are rumoured to value.

Of course, there are many composers who do not actively engage in antagonistic behaviour and treat music composed from different aesthetic perspectives with what might be described as 'tolerance', but this attempt to accept other styles does not appear to be without its own set of drawbacks. Here is Korsyn again:

Perhaps more pervasive than overt conflict, however, and even more corrosive, is a sort of radical nonengagement with competing approaches, so that the tensions between factions must be read between the lines, emerging as a significant absence rather than an obvious presence. Indeed, these tensions coexist with expressions of openness, with Enlightenment bromides about tolerance and diversity. Often scholars are willing to acknowledge other methods so long as they do not have to rethink their own – as long as these methods remain safely marginal.¹¹

I believe the same type of situation applies to music composition. Composers can be tolerant of other styles when they do not have to rethink their own position. Adopting this outlook, however, creates a situation in which plurality seems to become relative: composers simply choose their compositional viewpoints without having to really commit to ideas and expose themselves to attacks in the same way as, say, ethnomusicologists, who might come under harsh criticism regarding the validity and relevance of their approach.

For some composers, this is not a negative side to plurality; the 'anything goes' attitude is a source of artistic freedom. But one can see it from another angle. By passively accepting other approaches, composers' perspectives risk becoming stagnant, and their outlook never develops from the positive counterpoint with competing critical ideas. They remain unchallenged and blissfully satisfied with every passing thought or piece because the fundamental principles that guide the creation of their music remain unquestioned. Accepting plurality may become a damaging excuse for 'nonengagement'.

Many composers recognise the pitfalls of antagonistic behaviour and indifferent 'tolerance': antagonistic behaviour can be harmful and self-defeating, dividing the field into rival factions and groups, and 'tolerance' can be unproductive, allowing a composer's ideals to lie dormant and undeveloped. Instead of tolerating the differences between compositional styles, many composers attempt to celebrate them and regard the plurality within the discipline as an important aspect of contemporary compositional life. For example, university searches often try to pinpoint a candidate who

11. Korsyn: *Decentering music*, p.16.

will add diversity to the faculty, and national competitions, commissions and performers try to embrace a broad range of aesthetic perspectives, as well as a variety of geographies, institutional affiliations, genders and races. These steps appear to acknowledge the problems of antagonism and 'non-engagement' and attempt to remedy them, but they may also have some undesirable consequences. Actions taken to dissolve the tensions among different styles tend to shift the rivalries within each faction. In this case, the composers with whom one identifies now become the competition, and the factions become internally antagonistic. Conscious attempts to embrace plurality have the potential to create rivalries within each style of composition, where individual composers compete to represent their respective faction. I believe that this is a different type of antagonism because composers cannot control whether they participate in it or not, and they may not even be aware that they are being compared to those of like-minded aesthetic outlooks, genders, races and so forth. A composer's allies could transform into adversaries without them even knowing it.

If, for example, a composer whose music is largely tonal and minimalist applies for a university position, not only might he or she be rejected if an existing faculty member writes music in a similar style, but in the event that the applicant's compositional niche is not represented, the composers who also belong to that niche now become the adversaries. Even in national competitions, a wide range of geographies and institutional affiliations are frequently represented, which means that composers who once shared a common bond either through style, location or educational background change into stern, and often unknown, rivals.

I realise that I have not painted a very pretty picture. If the encouragement and celebration of plurality attempt to remedy the problems of overt antagonistic behaviour and 'bland tolerance' (and now I am saying that there are negative consequences to these actions as well), I appear to have described all of the ways in which a composer can regard the condition of plurality. Since every possible behaviour pattern causes problems, composers are damned if they do and damned if they don't. My intention, however, is not to find fault with the seeming positive steps that are taken to encourage diversity and respect among compositional factions. Rather, my point is to show that, whether composers are aware of it or not, many of the ways in which they interact and regard the plurality within their own field have possible drawbacks, and these drawbacks can dramatically impact, in a very real and concrete manner, their professional lives. And this is why I consider these issues to be creating a 'crisis'. Of course, it would be naive of me to think I could identify and solve some of the significant problems within the discipline in a single article, but I would like to suggest a number of ideas, at the end of this discussion, that may begin working towards a solution to some

of these problems. First, though, I think it might be constructive to examine the role of academic and professional associations because these institutions seem to be strong influences that contribute to many of the challenges facing early 21st-century composers.

THE incorporation of music as a field of study within academia is rather new; in fact, the first professor of music in the United States, Harvard's John Knowles Paine, was not appointed until 1875.¹² This is significant because music has not had a long-standing tradition in the American university setting, and music composition in particular occupies a tenuous position within academia in this country. One of the serious difficulties that has surfaced in the adoption of music within the university is that academic administrators cannot critically evaluate a composer's work according to the standards they might use for assessing work from other disciplines. The contemporary academic world typically measures success through the publication of books and articles, conference presentations, securing business and industry funding, research grants and contracts and academic and professional honours. These tried and true yardsticks measure a scholar's success and are factors that determine decisions of promotion and tenure – everyone knows the saying 'publish or perish'.

But composers do not really seem to do very many of these things. They rarely write books and articles (although they probably should), they do not really secure business or industry funding in the same way as a scientist or engineer, nor do they generate research grants or contracts like an historian, and because these criteria are not immediately apparent aspects of music composition, academic administrators seem to have been forced into developing different norms to evaluate the quality of a composer's work. Books and articles are now commissions and performances, and an increased emphasis is placed upon awards, recognitions and honours. A steady stream of performances, high-profile commissions and honours from reputable professional associations symbolises success, and this means that the music itself is seldom evaluated on its own terms. A work is only as good as the commission that funded it, the group who performed it, the reviewer who acclaimed it and the professional organisations who awarded it. I may set 'Mary had a little lamb' for countertenor and sackbut ensemble, but if it wins the Pulitzer Prize, my position is secured. While this example is intentionally over the top, it is meant to illustrate that within the university setting, professional success in music composition has to be immediately tangible and quantifiable; this tends to shift the focus and importance away from the act of composition and the integrity of the composition itself, and towards the attainment of professional awards, honours and distinctions.¹³ Art is no longer an end: it is a means, or at least might become so if you want to keep your job.

12. www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2000/05.04/paine.html.

13. See Bill Readings: *The university in ruins*.

Naturally, these types of attitudes then trickle down and become instilled in student composers as they move through their academic training. Students write more pieces, for larger forces, and greater emphasis is placed on winning student awards, student commissions, studying with name-brand composers and getting into the best graduate schools. The study of composition is not only about writing music, but learning how to effectively position, network and market oneself in the field. This leaves many students with a 'what can you do for me' attitude as they interact with other musicians (performers and conductors in particular) and they quickly learn how to determine if another musician might be able to further their career. Of course, these performers and conductors are sent scores, CDs, letters and e-mails of thanks and appreciation, and are taken out to lunch – nothing more than greasing the wheels in the same way as any business person attempting to win a lucrative contract.

Unfortunately, professional organisations and performers seem intertwined in the trends and attitudes present within the university, and this affects younger, student composers in particular. There are an overwhelming number of composition contests, commissions and awards for student composers and composers under the age of 30. Students rush to complete works for submission to these competitions, trying to beat the clock in their late twenties before they become ineligible. This seems to drastically accelerate the maturation process, and almost implies that if one is not effectively established as a known composer with a highly regarded list of works and awards by around the age of 30, success is clearly beyond reach.

Please do not misinterpret my point here. I do believe that the university and professional associations are the backbone of the compositional world. I am trying to identify some of the possibly preconditioned consequences in the way these institutions are structured in the hope of generating constructive debate and possible answers, and I am not at all implying that brilliant compositions cannot and are not being produced within the environments of academia and through professional organisations. Professional organisations and performers tirelessly support the creation and performance of new works, and the university has supported music by incorporating it as an academic discipline. This is indeed a big deal. Few classical composers can make a living only by writing music, and while the adoption of music within the university has created new and significant challenges for composers, it has, at the same time, provided most of them with jobs. One might say that professional associations and the university are the combined respirators that keep classical music breathing in all its forms, but this circumstance then invites the question: is contemporary classical composition a FUBU discipline?

In the year 2000, classical music accounted for two per cent of all American record sales, and it is disturbing to think of what percentage con-

temporary composers hold, especially when record sales to universities are factored out. Who, then, is buying this music and going to concerts of new music? – the composers who write the music and the musicians who perform it. With few exceptions, a new music concert audience is largely comprised of musicians, either composers or performers, who specialise in contemporary works. In this way, composition becomes like the popular, urban outfitter FUBU, founded in 1992 in Hollis, Queens (a borough of New York City); the music is composed For Us By Us (FUBU).

Not surprisingly, there has been a recent tendency within classical music to appeal to a wider audience. Concerts might now include simultaneous film projections, light and visual effects shows, celebrity appearances, and even a fictional dialogue between a composer and his former communist oppressor. While this may be seen as a necessary creative change required to keep classical music alive within the public setting, these new steps may also be interpreted as the product of dwindling attendance figures and budget problems. In an attempt to shed its stuffy, élitist image, classical music is forced to become more ‘Hollywood’ and sensationalised in order to attract a larger paying audience, and pieces that fit this mold are often given priority in concert programming because they help boost ticket sales. Even a steady dose of the classics (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and others) coupled with corporate and private funding is not enough to keep classical music financially self-sufficient. In another effort to increase profitability, physical appearance and sexuality are often used as a marketing tool and selling point, especially for women performers. Suggestive poses and revealing outfits sometimes take priority over interpretation and musicality since a short skirt or transparent blouse will sell albums regardless of the quality of the music.

The ideas presented in this article are intended to challenge contemporary composition’s understanding of itself. My goal is not to deconstruct the field or deliver a ‘what’s wrong with the discipline’ lecture. On the contrary, I realise that I, and probably most composers, have benefited directly from much of what I have described as the ‘crisis’ within music composition – this does not mean, however, things cannot and should not be improved. The world of the arts seems to pride itself on being virtuous, one of the few remaining bastions of society not overtly penetrated and driven by corporatist values, greed or pretense. Perhaps it is because I cling to this idealistic view that I am trying to show how a critique of music composition, much in the spirit of Korsyn’s critique of musical research, can reveal many of the presupposed conditions that shape the life of the contemporary composer. By understanding these features, I think we may be able to suggest powerful changes to the discipline.

For example, submissions to competitions, awards and commissions, and especially those intended for young composers, should be anonymous.

Name recognition can lead to biased decisions based on previous accomplishments, factional and teacher-student nepotism, or the exact opposite can occur. In an effort to 'spread out the wealth' composers may be rejected because they appear to have already received a number of reputable distinctions. In addition, resumé, biographies, curriculum vitae, recommendations, lists of teachers, and so forth should be excluded from consideration. Unless there is a conscious effort to include a diversity of university affiliations, geographies, genders and races, I have a difficult time imagining how this information could be important in evaluating a composer's music, with the exception of establishing student status, but in this case, a resumé, biography or curriculum vitae is entirely unnecessary. I have already shown how this can shift antagonistic behaviour from among rival factions to within them, creating a circumstance where individual composers compete to become the representative of their respective faction, and even when sponsoring organisations and adjudication committees elect to operate in this way, they should make these practices public. If the music is only a relative percentage of what is considered in competitions, commissions and awards, let us not disillusion ourselves with notions of neutrality and fairness.

ALLOW me to propose another idea: classical composers should have a vehicle for structured reflection and debate: in other words, a professional journal should exist where articles, analyses and essays could be presented. Historical musicology, which in the last 15 years published only two articles out of 136 directly dealing with living composers in *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* (both articles were on the same composer, Pierre Boulez), and music theory do not seem to prioritise contemporary composition – *Perspectives of New Music* is one of the notable exceptions. I believe composers should have greater opportunities to engage in the critical exchange of ideas that may challenge them directly and intellectually because the lack of these opportunities reinforces 'bland tolerance' and 'nonengagement'. A professional journal would also give composers a far greater exposure to different perspectives of composition and would provide a forum for dialogue between composers who may never have otherwise come into contact with each other's views. This is very important because most composers today are trained in the university setting, which means that, upon completion of a doctorate, they may have attended three schools and studied with anywhere from six to eight different teachers. Considering that teachers can place incredible pressures, directly or indirectly, upon their students to write music similar to their own, a composer may leave the student phase of their career completely unaware of different movements or styles. Earlier in the paper, I identified the difficulties of factional self-perpetuation, where factions attempt to implant ideas of superiority within

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the minds of composers in order to insure the survival of their distinct stylistic preference, and a professional journal might alleviate the isolated existence some composers experience, especially over the course of their academic training.

From another point of view, the whole idea that composers write music, exclusively, and do not write articles or essays may be largely self-defeating. If composers were to be more accepting of written publications as valid professional work, it may ease some of the difficulties in the evaluation of a composer's credentials within the university setting. Of course, some may argue that composers should be judged according to how they write music, not how they write articles or essays, but let me remind them that, as I have tried to show, to academia a work is only as good as the commission that funded it, the group who performed it, the reviewer who acclaimed it and the professional institutions who awarded it. Does this have anything to do with the music? I believe it would be a positive contribution to the discipline if composers could produce and maintain a serial publication that rivalled the major journals in historical musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory.

These ideas do not represent the final solution to many of the issues I have raised and questions I have asked; rather, I asked them hoping they would stimulate and inspire composers to engage in further discussion, even if their

conclusions turn out to contradict my own thoughts. I realise that many aspects to what I have identified as a crisis of identity in music composition still remain unexplored, such as the influence of the concert world, which often operates in an intentionally oppositional way to academia, the impact of publishers and agents, who may pressure composers into a more commercialised approach to their craft, the exclusion of contemporary works as a significant part of performance repertoire within academic training, and many others. In addition, I understand that my ideas are the result of my personal experiences in the field of American music composition up to this point in my career, and other composers may have radically different experiences, causing them to view many of the issues I have discussed in a vastly differing manner. But regardless of how we might view it, the crisis of identity seems to influence the very core of what it means to be a composer at the beginning of the 21st century, and I hope to have generated a new and critical focus on these topics.

Jonathan R. Pieslak is Assistant Professor of Music at The City College of New York, CUNY.

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