

## THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

We live in an age of sampling, mashups, remakes, reruns, and retro fashions. Indeed, the past has become such an everyday presence in our lives that it may be hard to understand what was so startlingly novel about operas like *Die Soldaten* (The Soldiers, 1965), in which Bernd Alois Zimmermann employed historical forms and elements of jazz alongside quotations from Bach chorales; or Ligeti's *Le grand macabre* (The Grand Macabre, 1978), with its wildly farcical libretto and musical allusions to Monteverdi, Offenbach, Beethoven, and others. The Russian

composer Alfred Schnittke, who coined the term Polystylism, composed works such as the Concerto Grosso No. 1 (1977), with its sardonically reworked quotations from Vivaldi, Mozart, and Beethoven. After earning recognition for texture music like the *Threnody: To the Victims of Hiroshima* (see Chapter 12), Krzysztof Penderecki surprised many with a series of works including the Symphony No. 2 (*Christmas*, 1980) and the *Polish Requiem* (1984, rev. 2005) that reconnect to tonality, Romanticism, and the sacred choral tradition. Even electronic music began to engage with the past with *Switched-On Bach* (1968), which was marketed as a demonstration of synthesizers joining the historical mainstream (see Chapter 11).

Among the most notable examples of this reengagement with history is the four-movement *Sinfonia* by Luciano Berio, composed in 1968 for the 125th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic (a fifth movement was added the following year). The work brings together an astonishing range of elements, above all in the third movement, *In Ruhig fliessender bewegung* (With a Peaceful Flowing Motion), which is based on the Scherzo of Mahler's Second Symphony. Berio wrote that Mahler's music "seems to carry all the weight of the last two centuries of musical history." Just how much heavier that weight had become for Berio is evident in the many quotations he superimposes on Mahler's score, including excerpts from Bach, Beethoven, Berlioz, Strauss, Ravel, Stravinsky, Berg, Boulez, and Stockhausen.

On top of this orchestral collage, a group of eight solo voices superimposes passages from Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* (1953), James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and urban graffiti. Although the sonic effect is chaotic, Berio's musical and textual quotations were carefully chosen to comment on each other and on the larger themes of the work. The passages by Beethoven (the *Scene by the Brook* from the *Pastoral* Symphony) and Berg (the drowning scene from *Wozzeck*), for example, echo the watery imagery of Mahler's song *St. Anthony's Sermon to the Fish*, which was the basis of his symphonic Scherzo.

Berio's rich web of allusions is apparent at the outset of the third movement. The first music we hear comes not from Mahler's Scherzo (which doesn't appear until Rehearsal 1) but from the crashing chord that begins the fourth movement of Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* (1909; see Chapter 3), whose programmatic title, *Peripetie* (Peripeteia), is announced immediately by the voices. Berio's evocation of peripeteia, the sudden reversal of fate in a Greek drama, suggests that he saw *Sinfonia* as a turning point, both in his artistic development and in contemporary music in general.

As the opening chord fades away, the flutes begin a passage from Mahler; but rather than the Second Symphony, as expected, we hear the opening six measures of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony. The voices note the confusion by announcing the tempo markings at the start of the Fourth—"nicht eilen, bitte" (don't rush, please) and "recht gemächlich" (quite leisurely)—while Soprano 1 exclaims with bewilderment. Meanwhile, other instruments and voices introduce a passage from *Jeux de vagues* (Play of the Waves), the second movement of Debussy's *La mer* (The Sea), another quotation connected to the watery Mahler

song. In these opening measures of Berio's piece, the quotations are identified by the voices; in measures 7–10 we even get a little summary in French of what we have heard so far: the phrases “fourth symphony” and “first part” refer to the quotation from the first movement of Mahler's Fourth, while “fourth part” alludes to the fourth movement of Schoenberg's Op. 16, and so on. But for the rest of the piece we are generally on our own. As we struggle to hold on in the midst of the confusion, the voices exhort us to “keep going,” even as they ask, “Where now?” With its dense and complex surface, Berio's *Sinfonia* could be heard as texture music, but together with the mass effects there is a sense that the individual parts are striving to assert their own histories and identities.

## QUOTATION, PROTEST, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Berio's complex relationship to musical tradition was shaped by his early experiences in a family of professional musicians, as well as by Fascist suppression of contemporary music in Italy. Not until after the war, when he began his studies at the Milan Conservatory, did he hear works by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and other Modernists; his first contact with twelve-tone music came through studies with Luigi Dallapiccola at the Berkshire Music Festival in Western Massachusetts. As is clear from his appearances in Chapters 11 and 12, Berio did not align himself with any single stance or orthodoxy. In addition to his involvement with electronic music and extended techniques, he pursued a lifelong interest in folk music. His cycle *Folk Songs* (1964), composed for Cathy Berberian, features small-ensemble tonal arrangements of songs from France, Italy, Azerbaijan, and the United States.

In an article that appeared in the summer of 1968—in the *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper rather than a specialist music journal like *Die Reihe*—Berio observed that never before had the average composer “come so dangerously close to becoming an extraneous, or merely decorative, figure in his own society.” He acknowledged that music is powerless to stop wars or “lower the cost of bread”—phrases that he also includes in *Sinfonia*. Nevertheless, he wrote, “responsible composers” felt increasingly “compelled to challenge the meaning of and reasons for their work in relation to the world of events.”

In referencing the “world of events,” Berio was placing his music in the context of the radical and sometimes violent cultural, social, and political transformations that swept across the United States and Europe in the 1960s. In the second movement of *Sinfonia*, Berio paid tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated in 1968: The slowly unfolding textures of *O King* are based on the phonemes of the slain civil rights leader's name. These years were marked by a long struggle against discrimination, including the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. César Chavez organized migrant laborers in the National Farm Workers Association (1962), the National Organization for Women and the Black Panther Party were founded (1966), and the gay rights movement launched with the Stonewall riots

in New York's Greenwich Village (1969). At the same time, the Vietnam War set off a tidal wave of student-led protest that crested in 1968. These years also saw the emergence of violent left-wing groups such as the Weather Underground in the United States and the Red Army Faction in West Germany, which advocated armed resistance against their governments.

Berio's plea for classical composers to become more politically engaged or risk obsolescence reflected the reality that musicians working in popular styles were leading the way in addressing social and political issues. Music associated with the American civil rights and antiwar movements surged to the top of the *Billboard* charts. Many of the protest songs that reached a mass audience in the 1960s were explicitly political, including Pete Seeger's "If I Had a Hammer," Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," and Barry Sadler's anti-antiwar "Ballad of the Green Berets." The 1968 Broadway opening of *Hair*, subtitled "The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical," confirmed that there was a mainstream market for the mores, politics, and values of the youth counterculture. The hippie movement, with its embrace of psychedelic drugs and music, free love, and radical politics, found immortality in the "Three Days of Peace and Music" of the 1969 Woodstock Festival in upstate New York.

To be sure, many of the works we encountered in previous chapters had significant political dimensions, but composers in the 1960s and 1970s felt driven to take a more explicitly political stance in their music. The question was, how? As was the case during the interwar years (see Chapter 7), composers debated how any kind of art directed to the "elite" audience of contemporary classical music could be dissident or oppositional. Some, like the American composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990), sought to straddle the worlds of classical music and Broadway. His hugely popular musical *West Side Story* (1957) retold *Romeo and Juliet* to dramatize tensions between white and Puerto Rican gangs in New York City. His *Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers* (1971) featured an eclectic score with rock and blues passages and an antiwar message so explicit that President Richard Nixon was advised to stay away from the premiere at the Kennedy Center. Others reached back to avant-garde movements early in the century, such as Dada, Futurism, and Surrealism, that commented on society more elliptically by challenging the traditional forms and institutions of the arts. In this context we can see that quoting familiar music and borrowing from past and present styles offered composers a solution to the challenge of making their music more broadly accessible and politically effective.