
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From Robin Maconie

Julian Anderson ('Messiaen and the notion of influence', *Tempo* vol. 63 no. 247) may be interested to add to his collection a citation from Webern following the same pattern. Note collections from the beginning of the Coda of Webern's op. 27 Variations (1936), measures 56–60 of Movement III, reappear spontaneously in measure 10 of *the Île de Feu 1* for piano (1949), in order but reduced to simple chords, first at pitch, then transposed down a whole tone. There is no doubt that what is going on is a direct citation from Webern.

As his student at the time I was able to point out the two passages to Messiaen one day after the end of class. He appeared slightly embarrassed and also intrigued. If not a conscious allusion, the citation, from which incidentally all of Webern's nuances of timing and expression are eliminated, may be explained as an instance of 'finger memory' from sight-reading the work at the piano. Or, more prosaically, Messiaen may have made a sketch note of the harmonic sequence on first acquaintance, perhaps for teaching purposes, and later come across and incorporated the sketch as a 'found object' into his own piano piece, without remembering where it originated.

As Julian Anderson indicates, the completeness with which other composers' material is remembered in citations of this kind can be a useful indicator of underlying differences in aesthetic and perceptual priorities. This is one of several examples of conscious or unconscious citation by early 20th-century composers discussed in my paper 'Towards a Psychology of Musical Aesthetics' published in *Soundings* 9 (1979/80), pp. 37–54.

It would arguably be second nature for an organist such as Messiaen to understand and exploit the harmonic possibilities of inharmonic partial tones. Jolivet may owe his inspiration to the newly invented ondes martenot, since Helmholtz is not a creatively stimulating read. In 'Penser la Musique Aujourd'hui' (Exx. 3, 4, 5) Boulez recommends an outwardly analogous harmony generation process for 12-tone music, which he calls 'multiplication', a concept he would later pursue into the electronic domain. None of the three processes is wholly rational or scientific, and all look back to the distinctively French aesthetic of Debussy and Ravel as well as ahead to so-called spectral composition.

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Peter Palmer has contributed to numerous music periodicals since 1971 as well as *New Grove* and *MGG*. He was founding editor of *The Bruckner Journal*. He has undertaken translation work for music publishers in the USA and Europe. His special interests include Symbolism circa 1900, 20th-century German and English songs and contemporary folk singers.

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