

Jeffrey Boeckman. *A Counterpoint of Characters: the Music of Michael Colgrass*. Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008. 97 pp. ISBN-13: 978-3-8364-8243-1 (pb).

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This book focuses on the artistic development of American composer Michael Colgrass, the evolution of his work, and his acting and theater studies. Definitions and examples of "polycultural musics" (use of quotation and paraphrase) are examined in great detail. Analyses of two works, *Deja vu* and *Winds of Nagual*, conclude the book.

The title "counterpoint of characters" refers to Colgrass's eclectic style—his use of American postwar serialism, jazz, romanticism, and Ivesian dissonances, as well as his experiences as a percussionist and acting student. Boeckmann differentiates between linear counterpoint (two or more contrasting styles which "alternate and influence each other over an extended period of time") and horizontal counterpoint (layers of "stylistically disparate materials atop one another"). Colgrass's early work in quotation and stylistic allusion developed into a "polyphony of styles." An example of this can be found in the fifth movement of *As Quiet As* (for orchestra) where Colgrass takes a Beethoven sonatina theme and transforms it into the styles of Haydn, Ravel, Sibelius, a neoclassical Stravinsky, and Count Basie. In *Urban Requiem*, the theme from Bach's *Musical Offering* is played as a duet between the baritone saxophone and the bass clarinet, then, in strict march time, transforms itself through arpeggios into a gypsy dance air, later high woodwinds present the theme in a serial fashion, and, when the chorale tune returns in the low brass and horns, three layers develop their thematic material independently of each other.

Colgrass began his musical career as a self-taught drummer in neighborhood jazz bands. He studied percussion with Paul Price and composition with Eugene Weigel at the University of Illinois at Urbana. As a freelance percussionist in New York he studied with the serialist composer Ben Weber. Among his many fellowships and awards he received a 1978 Pulitzer Prize for *Dèjà vu* (commissioned and premiered by the New York Philharmonic) and a 1982 Emmy Award for the PBS (Public Broadcasting System) documentary *Soundings: The Music of Michael Colgrass*.

Colgrass studied acting at the Commedia dell'Arte in Milan, physical training at the Polish Theatre Laboratory, and acting improvisation and scene study with Bill Hickey at the HB [Herbert Berghof] studio in New York. Colgrass applied the "what if" technique—a theatrical improvisational method—to musical ensembles, exploring such concepts as the "Objective," the "Unbroken Line," and the "Magic If." The "Objective" asks "What would I do if...?" to define a goal. The "Unbroken Line" finds short-term and long-term actions, which can follow each other to achieve the goal. Here Colgrass takes a musical phrase through a section and then a movement; he decides whether a new mood develops from a previous one or negates it, whether it is a diversion or the narrative of the piece. With the "Magic If" the actor develops different interpretations and circumstances for his character to experience; thus his character responds with spontaneous give and

take. His work with the "What If" concept continued at UCLA into the 1970s with Lukas Foss and his Improvisation Chamber Ensemble. When applying improvisation principles to music, each instrument or section (as actors in a play) has a unique and different character (i.e., a melody, harmony or style).

The analysis of *Winds of Nagual*, a tone poem for wind ensemble based on the writings of Carlos Castaneda, is really the heart of this book. Boeckman examines the work by program, episodes, and form with detailed pitch class analysis adding a theoretical basis to the programmatic elements of the piece. *Winds of Nagual* contains narrative throughout the score with such designations as "Carlos stares at the water and becomes a bubble." Each of the three characters, Juan, Carlos, and don Genaro, has his own theme. Juan's theme is "dark and ominous, yet gentle and kind;" Carlos' theme is "open, direct and naïve;" Don Genaro has no theme of his own; he twists and contorts Carlos' melody. Boeckman provides a chart that clearly displays the seven movements' length in measures, metronome markings, tempi indications and thematic formal structure (A B C D C1 B1 A).

DVM Verlag Dr. Müller publishes completed research dissertations, and this little book (97 p. double spaced) is from a 2005 University of Wisconsin Madison DMA document. The publisher is not known for providing any editorial assistance and that is evident in the following areas: typographical and grammatical errors, incomplete or unclear references, some layout and format problems, and unverified errata lists.

The book is recommended for its information on Colgrass's background and its analysis of *Winds of Nagual*. The explanation of "polymusics" is lengthy and not particularly edifying. An errata sheet for *Winds of Nagual* is included with no explanation of the source for the corrections.