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SALZBURG SEMINAR IN AMERICAN STUDIES  
SCHLOSS LEOPOLDSKRON, SALZBURG, AUSTRIA  
SESSION 167: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MUSIC  
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American music in Salzburg? Why go there? Well, there was the opportunity of nearly three weeks there in the spring, the last week coinciding with the world-famous Salzburg Easter Festival. But even if one were lucky enough to be elected a fellow, would it be worth it? How could all the facilities required by musicians be brought in so as to make the Seminar something more than a sterile experience in musicological exchanges or dry and pretentious theorising?

There was, however, the reputation of the faculty who would

teach the fellows (without payment, I might add) during the three weeks. Admittedly they all seemed to be Princeton men by origin, but they had developed in different ways since they were students. There were three composers — John Eaton, a Professor of Music at Indiana, and Claudio Spies (who actually studied at Harvard) and Paul Lansky, both Professors at Princeton — and Michael Steinberg, music critic of the *Boston Globe*, then on leave to write a book on Elliott Carter which will be published in the Eulenburg Books series edited by Sir William Glock.

And what about one's colleagues? From the outset the 39 fellows were amazingly friendly and communicative — and younger than I had expected. They came from 14 European countries, both East and West, as well as from the USA. The largest group were primarily composers, others were teachers and performers, and a few were not formally trained musicians at all, but working in closely related fields such as broadcasting, American literature and sociology.

The opening day allowed us to take in the famous vistas and the grandeur of Schloss Leopoldskron in which we were staying. The first dinner was real 'cordon bleu', and marvellous food was to be provided for the remainder of our stay. My own room, shared with one other fellow, overlooked the Schloss lake with the mountains beyond. Even if there were to be no music at all, this alone would make it a fine holiday! But to return to the programme: we learned that although John Cage, Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt had previously been here, this was the first purely musical session in the Salzburg Seminar's 29-year history. It was evident from the beginning that there would be no lack of response to this implicit challenge. We were a collection of polyglot individuals who were to contribute keenly, almost vociferously, to the lectures and seminars which followed.

The daily schedule (Saturdays and Sundays excepted) consisted of two morning lectures and two afternoon seminars. Each faculty member took it in turn to lecture, the emphasis being initially on an historical perspective with musical examples. There were also some more detailed lectures on particular works or on compositional techniques. Some examples of lecture titles in the opening week were 'American Music in the 20s and 30s' (Steinberg), 'Emigre composers in the United States in the 40s and 50s' (Spies), 'American Music in the 50s' (Eaton) and 'Concepts in Electronic Music' (Lansky). The later lectures were increasingly contemporary in content, centering on the last ten years, with some exploratory suggestions for new compositional paths. The seminars varied between the practical, the analytical and the evaluative. Spies and Lansky examined fellows' and some of their own compositions, Eaton chaired fellows' impressions and evaluations of several examples of American composers taken from recordings available, while Steinberg concentrated on the role of criticism and the duties and necessary limitations of the music critic.

In addition to the formal programme there was a musical event of some sort practically every evening — often fellows' compositions taped or live, or local concerts. Social events, including a dance, a barbecue and a banquet, were organised by the permanent staff, whose dedication, energy and charm throughout remain very memorable.

Issues were raised by all these events, not least by the formal programme which had to satisfy the varying experience and expectations of the fellows as well as the capabilities of the faculty. How, from a faculty angle, would it be possible to devise an adequate teaching programme for the fellows, some of whom were themselves eminent professors who might, however, have had little experience of American music, and others of whom were younger and might have heard plenty of American music but not in all cases be professional musicians or be interested solely in 'serious' music? So by the first Wednesday Jeffrey Cofer, a fellow with previous experience of the Salzburg Seminar, was co-opted alongside the faculty to give seminars on country music, blues, jazz and rock subjects.

This could not, of course, satisfy everyone all the time, but by the second week the formal programme was running smoothly enough, though it was very difficult to follow up all the classes. In their very limited spare time participants were able to listen to many records and tapes of contemporary American music on high quality equipment, or listen in the adjacent Meierhof building to a powerful set-up with additional recording facilities. The library resources were more modest. There were some interesting recent publications not generally available in Europe at present, as well as a small number of scores suitable for detailed analysis classes.

How did this all evolve? In arch form maybe, the greatest period of activity being towards the end of the second week with the evening events setting the scene for the real ebb and flow of ideas. The Seminar seemed to me like the USA itself — a melting pot full of life and struggle. This dynamism probably caused moans from most people at some time or other: for instance, composers obviously had different needs from others. Or had they? Was this not a great opportunity to talk *outwards* — to discuss the politics of musical creation, the politics of musical experience? Could there be no meeting point between the desires of those who viewed music as a phenomenon in itself — a thing apart — and those who ultimately saw music in terms of something else — a social expression? But the issue is perhaps wrongly expressed. It was not a case of 'either/or'. How could this consensus be accomplished between people whose different musical backgrounds would mean that such discussions could not reach a sufficiently high level, due to the

intrinsic difficulty of communicating in common terms back to the music itself? Besides, the concept of 'musical politics' might well suggest to a European the question 'what ideology (if any) is or should (or could) be communicated by those engaged in music?' To someone from the USA the concept might well revolve around how a composer can (or should) obtain adequate exposure of his music in the often frustrating, even seamy, hurly-burly of American musical life.

That small regret apart, I was personally glad to accept what was offered and was impressed by the faculty's sympathetic evaluations of composers from the West Coast of the USA, who were only represented at the Seminar by their music. I particularly valued the seminars on criticism, which on one occasion touched on the relationship between tourism and music. This was especially apt, considering that the Easter Festival was then taking place, the organisers of which generously gave us passes to one of Karajan's rehearsals. I found the solemn ethos of this rather unappealing, the lax rehearsal technique of the conductor contrasting with the wonderful resources of the orchestra. But times have changed since Beethoven: respectable people are no longer led by aristocratic taste to demand new music. I was left wondering if it would not be particularly hard for a young Austrian composer to get a fair hearing in a land continuing to benefit from Mozart's blood, sweat and tears.

But it is better to dwell on the more memorable moments: Professor Leopoldo Gamberini's 'I Madrigalisti di Genova', who sang Renaissance music with such sustained flexibility and emotion, John Eaton's *Blind Man's Cry* and, perhaps most of all, Boguslaw Schaffer's *Missa Elettronica*, quite the most immediately appealing and inspiring work in this genre that I have yet heard. I also cannot forget guitarist Joseph Lewis's remarkable extemporary musical/poetical and dramatic abilities as demonstrated in his late evening recital.

I came away with the conviction that American music is the most dynamic in the world, that this session must surely be the first of many, that no one composer or style could ever 'represent' American music in all its richness, and that we should all increase our efforts, energies and enthusiasms to secure the future of new music whenever we have the chance. For me, then, a remarkable experience, and any reader who turned down the chance to go should not do so again! For many of us, of course, the Seminar will not end in Salzburg, but will go on through the friendships we have made.