Composing Freedom: Elliott Carter’s ‘Self-Reinvention’ and the Early Cold War

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ABSTRACT

DANIEL GUBERMAN: Composing Freedom: Elliott Carter’s ‘Self-Reinvention’ and the Early Cold War
(Under the direction of Brigid Cohen)

In this dissertation I examine Elliott Carter’s development from the end of the Second World War through the 1960s arguing that he carefully constructed his postwar compositional identity for Cold War audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. The majority of studies of Carter’s music have focused on technical aspects of his methods, or roots of his thoughts in earlier philosophies. Making use of published writings, correspondence, recordings of lectures, compositional sketches, and a drafts of writings, this is one of the first studies to examine Carter’s music from the perspective of the contemporary cultural and political environment. In this Cold War environment Carter emerged as one of the most prominent composers in the United States and Europe. I argue that Carter’s success lay in part due to his extraordinary acumen for developing a public persona. And his presentation of his works resonated with the times, appealing simultaneously to concert audiences, government and private foundation agents, and music professionals including impresarios, performers and other composers. This detailed study of a single composer sheds new light on how artists were able to negotiate the complex economies of the Cold War artistic environment.
To my parents
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Introduction: Elliott Carter as Engaged Composer

All my compositions are or are not influenced by the music of what are called ‘12-tone composers’ as much as they are influenced by Guillaume de Machaut, Bach, Beethoven – I cannot distinguish nor can I say that I am consciously influenced more by one composer than another – the daily newspaper (particularly these days) influences me more than anything else (not, of course, on the music page).¹

In this 1961 letter Elliott Carter responds to questions about technical methods and influences in his works by stating that he cannot ascribe specific musical influences to composers and pieces, but he is certain the newspaper plays a central role. Carter’s emphasis on the importance of non-musical influences in response to Paul Freeman’s questions seems paradoxical considering that in public statements he frequently tried to distance his music from possible external influences.² At the same time, throughout his career he placed an emphasis on music as a means of communication, often stating that his music would provide a more precise reflection of his thoughts than he could offer

¹ Letter from Elliott Carter to Paul Freeman, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1961. Freeman was a graduate student in music theory at the Eastman School of Music.

² Carter has often expressed concerned with the idea of external influences affecting a listener’s interaction with his music. For example, in a 1982 letter to Baliant Andras Varga, who had asked about the influence of external events Carter wrote: “Poetry has had a considerable influence on many of my works- Lucretius on my Double Concerto, St. John Perse’s Vents on my Concerto for Orchestra…” However, when addressing the Double Concerto in program notes in 1975 he explained that Lucretius’s poem merely “suggested a literary analog.” Similarly “Pope’s poem seemed to articulate in words the end of the work I had already composed” (Elliott Carter, “Double Concerto for Harpsichord and Piano with Two Chamber Orchestras [1961] Duo for Violin and Piano [1974],” in The Writings of Elliott Carter: An American Composer Looks at Modern Music edited by Else Stone and Kurt Stone [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977], 329). Thus, it is unclear whether these influences actually helped him conceive of the musical work, or merely arrived later as a means of helping new listeners approach his compositions. I believe sufficient evidence points to the former.
through writing. This claim accompanied his actions. He produced significantly less writing as his career progressed, and ultimately relied on interviews to share his thoughts in prose. In this dissertation I examine Carter’s development during the period from the end of the Second World War through the 1960s arguing that he carefully constructed his postwar compositional identity for Cold War audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

Claiming that a composer of the post-World War II era wrote music and sought to engage audiences in ways that reached beyond the music page of the newspaper should be of relatively little consequence. However, amidst the plethora of recent Carter scholarship, especially in the years since his 100th birthday, few have addressed connections between Carter’s music and the world around him. Numerous studies have

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3 The idea of music offering a means of expression and communication not available through writing appears repeatedly in Carter’s lectures and correspondence. It was one of the first topics he approached in a series of lectures he gave in Minnesota to accompany a performance of his Piano Concerto in 1967 (quotations from these lectures are my transcriptions of audio recordings held by the Paul Sacher Stiftung): “As a composer I would never think of writing a note in my music that didn’t seem to me to have a meaning, now I can’t tell you what meaning is, but I do write things every once in a while that seem to have no meaning to me so I don’t put them in the composition, I write something else.” He continued to explain that the attempt to translate these ideas into words through program notes often failed: “And I think that this is one of the reasons for instance that program notes are so confusing... Naturally the composer wants his music to be understood and liked and he writes whatever he can about it, but it is very often impossible for him to have the perspective on it that would allow him to present his ideas verbally in a way that is clear to an audience (Elliott Carter, “Minnesota Workshop,” July 3, 1967, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung).”


5 Often Cold War institutions crossed public/private boundaries. An example which appeared many times in Carter’s career is the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which claimed to be private while secretly accepting funding from the CIA, and collaborated with government officials in its diplomacy work.

focused on music-theoretical questions, providing musical analyses of Carter’s complex works that shed light on his methods of relating musical elements such as pitch, rhythm, and timbre.\(^7\) Other studies, such as James Wierzbicki’s biography, seek to understand the philosophical underpinnings of these musical innovations, but look for roots in Carter’s past rather than contemporary world events.\(^8\) What I perceive as a trend of de-contextualization began with the revisions to David Schiff’s *The Music of Elliott Carter*, the first comprehensive examination of Carter’s music and career. In the process of revising the work for its second edition in 1998 Schiff changed from a chronological discussion of Carter’s music to one based on genre.\(^9\) In doing so, a great deal of the context and connections between contemporaneous works was lost. The second edition serves as a reference object with brief segregated sections analyzing each work independently, rather than a comprehensive overview tracing the development of the composer’s thoughts and methods.\(^10\)

One challenge in finding the connections between Carter’s compositions and the external world is that he was so hesitant to discuss them. Carter was turned off by what he perceived as a need on the part of some of his contemporaries to use words to explain

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\(^7\) Some influential studies include work by David Schiff, Jonathan Bernard, Andrew Mead, and David Harvey.


\(^9\) The change is especially odd because Carter frequently composed for unusual combinations of instruments that may defy genre-based definitions. For example, chamber music is divided into the categories: string quartets, chamber music for wind instruments, and chamber music for piano and other mixed ensembles. I discuss these changes and de-contextualization further in Chapter Two.

and justify their compositions, along with audience expectations that a composer’s words could elucidate their compositions.\textsuperscript{11} If music served as a means of communication, Carter did not believe the composer should be responsible for providing a translation. During the early Cold War period, from the late 1940s through the 1960s, Carter moved away not only from prose writing, but also the use of voice and texts in his compositions. Today few would consider Carter a primarily choral or vocal composer, but rather someone most famous perhaps for his string quartets, a genre associated with musical purity and abstraction. However, early in his career Carter used texts and the chorus as a means of political expression through music. For example, his \textit{Defense of Corinth}, while based on a seventeenth-century translation of a sixteenth-century French text, draws clear parallels with contemporary politics, either as a protest against American neutrality or as a “cynical view of the value of an artist’s production in a time of war.”\textsuperscript{12} Many composers adopting new styles that had the potential to alienate traditional audiences saw texted music as a means of bridging the gap. A history of such texted compositional developments might include Schoenberg’s \textit{Pierrot Lunaire}, Babbitt’s \textit{Philomel}, and Stockhausen’s \textit{Momente}. During Carter’s important stylistic change of the late 1940s he moved away from the voice, not writing another piece with a voice until 1975. While many attribute this move away from the voice to the complexity of his compositions from

\textsuperscript{11} In the Minnesota lecture, Carter justified his hesitance to speak about his compositions by pointing to Beethoven as an example: “Beethoven would have made a very bad college professor because people asked him what his music meant and he went back to the piano and played his piece over again, after all in a way colleges are word factories and if you can’t talk you shouldn’t be here, I sometimes wonder why I am.”

\textsuperscript{12} Meyer and Shreffler, 47. See also Schiff (1998), 157. Schiff proposes both readings, however attributes them only to the text while avoiding either interpretation of Carter’s music: “Carter had political motives, for in 1941, before the United States entered the war, this text could be read as a protest against American neutrality, and against the artist’s own sense of uselessness at a time of national crisis. Carter included a French translation of the text in his score, suggesting he actively thought about the international implications of his choice.”
the era, a close examination of sources reveals a political element to both his move away from texted compositions and his new approach to ensemble writing.

**Choral Music as a Political Act and Carter’s Abandonment of the Chorus**

Carter’s early choral works were championed by G. Wallace Woodsworth, director of the Harvard Glee Club, who commissioned three works from Carter over 10 years and regularly scheduled performances during the group’s tours. In addition to his *Tarantella* (1937), *Defense of Corinth* (1941), and *Emblems* (1947) for the Harvard Glee Club, Carter composed *Let’s Be Gay* (1937) for the Wells College Glee Club, directed by his friend, Nicholas Nabokov. In 1937 Carter attempted to organize a madrigal choir in New York, for which he composed *To Music* and *Harvest Home*. Other choral works from this period include *Heart Not So Heavy as Mine* (1938), *The Harmony of Morning* (1944), and *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere* (1945). After *Emblems*, however, Carter withdrew from choral writing for six decades, not writing another piece in the genre until 2007.

Carter’s initial reasons for moving away from choral writing may have been that he felt American ensembles were incapable of performing works that met the technical demands he began placing on performers in his postwar compositions. America had no professional choral tradition, and his compositions for the Harvard Glee Club were generally regarded as difficult to perform, requiring extra rehearsals. Carter stated that he did not plan to continue composing for chorus in a talk at Harvard in 1953 titled “The Need for New Choral Music.” In this talk he emphasized that it was not composers who had to be convinced of the value of choral music, but choruses and audiences who had to

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13 In his correspondence with Woodsworth, Carter discusses the difficulty of *The Defense of Corinth*. See Meyer and Shreffler, 45-49.
convince the composer that there was a market. Carter first presented himself as a composer who would be happy to continue writing for the chorus, but in the end he excluded himself from this group, and declared that he would no longer write simplified compositions in the genre: “for me at least the time for writing deliberately simplified music has come to an end.”¹⁴ Thus, Carter claimed that strengthening America’s choral tradition would be valuable, but he cautioned that he would not undertake the task. Scholars have accepted this as the primary reason for the six decades between *Emblems* and his next choral piece *Mad Regales* for six solo voices, which Shreffler and Meyer see as acknowledgement of “the fact that, in the intervening years, several vocal ensembles on the contemporary music scene had reached a level of skill and virtuosity barely imaginable in the 1950s.”¹⁵

The idea that choral music must be simplified may have seemed true in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but it did not last for even a decade. Carter’s conception of choral music changed drastically when he heard Luigi Nono’s *Il Canto Sospeso* during his travels in Europe in the late 1950s. The second movement, for *a cappella* chorus, fascinated Carter both through its intense demands on performers and its ability to communicate. As such, it became a staple in his lectures on contemporary music in the 1960s. In a 1963 lecture at Dartmouth University Carter focused on the unprecedented effects Nono produced from the chorus through the use of contrasting dynamics:

> The notion of unvoicing chords, so to speak, having unbalanced chords, in which some notes are louder than others, this is something that people had never thought of before or seldom… composers had never written chords that had varieties of different loudnesses within their notes… Somebody is


singing a pianissimo low note and somebody is shouting on a loud. This
gives an extraordinary impression, just that it is very moving and sort of
unexpected in character.\textsuperscript{16}

By focusing on Nono’s compositional techniques, Carter avoided, for the most part,
discussing the explicit political implications of Nono’s setting of Thomas Mann’s text,
drawn from letters written by victims of fascism. Carter did, however, point out that he
found Nono’s setting effective and moving. Recognizing that the musical setting of the
text rendered it virtually incomprehensible, he even felt compelled to recite it for his
audience before playing clips from a recording. He explained that the work served as
evidence that “advanced technique can be used for very dramatic and powerful things.”\textsuperscript{17}

Throughout his lectures at Dartmouth, it seems that Carter’s encounter with
Nono’s choral composition and European ensembles capable of performing the work
made him reconsider his own choral works. When discussing his compositional
development he placed an emphasis on Emblems, describing his attempts to compose
contrasting characters for the piano and chorus as a precursor to the contrasting
ensembles in the Double Concerto:

I was asked to write for the Harvard Glee Club for piano and men’s chorus
and I thought it would be interesting to write a piano concerto for piano

\textsuperscript{16} This is my transcription of the audio recording of his lecture. A copy of the recording is held in the Paul
Sacher Stiftung archives.

\textsuperscript{17} The effectiveness of Nono’s methods were called into question by Stockhausen, who said of the work:
“In certain pieces of the ‘Canto’, Nono composed the text as if to withdraw it from the public eye where it
has no place . . . The texts are not delivered, but rather concealed in such a regardlessly strict and dense
musical form that they are hardly comprehensible when performed. To what end, then, text, and
particularly this one? One can explain it as follows: particularly when setting those passages from the
letters where one is most ashamed that they had to be written, the musician acts purely as composer, even
though he had previously selected just these texts: he does not interpret, he does not comment: rather he
reduces language to its syllables, and from these he makes music” (Karlheinz Stockhausen, ‘Music and
University Press, 2001), 202-206. Carter overcame the potential problem of withdrawing the text from the
public eye by reciting it himself prior to playing the recording.
and men’s chorus accompanying, and as you can see in this piece which would then make the piano have a free part that was separate and different and idiomatic from the chorus and to make this a kind of meaningful thing that had a relationship to the text… It starts with a choral introduction and then there is a middle movement which is sort of a piano concerto and then there’s a last movement in which the piano gradually is overwhelmed again by the chorus. When I play my Double Concerto you will see very similar patterns in my most recent work which follow very much the same kind of thing in motion of the accompanying medium allowing the soloist to appear and then get overwhelmed again.  

When Carter delivered another lecture series in Minnesota four years later he did not express the same excitement about Il Canto Sospeso, but he had become convinced of the technical abilities of even American choruses, stating: “I never would have thought anybody could do it, there are quite a number of choruses now in Europe and even in the United States that do things as difficult as this.”

Despite his renewed faith in the abilities of choral ensembles, his fascination with the products of Nono’s complex writing for voices, and his continued interest in connecting music to poetry, Carter still avoided composing for chorus. He finally explained his hesitance to compose choral works in a 1986 letter to Ann Santen refusing her request to commission such a piece. Santen directed WGUC, a classical music radio station in Cincinnati, and had helped to arrange the recording of Carter’s Piano Concerto and Variations for Orchestra by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Michael Gielen. Carter begins his letter about the new commission explaining that his earlier choral works

18 The description of a solo pianist gradually becoming overwhelmed by the chorus parallels the relationship between the piano and the orchestra in the Piano Concerto, which he was beginning to think about at this time.

19 My transcription of audio recordings in the Paul Sacher Stiftung archives. I will discuss Carter’s change of attitude towards Nono’s composition in more detail in Chapter Two, arguing that it reflected Carter’s own feelings with regard to serialism.

20 Carter considered composing a cantata based on Hart Crane’s poem The Bridge, but ultimately removed the chorus, turning it into his Symphony of Three Orchestras.
were written under different circumstances: “I hope, meanwhile, you have received the letters I wrote about Michael Gielen and the recordings, among them my complete choral works – all written before the lessons of the ‘40’s had sunk in, when I saw life very differently than I do now.”

Carter continues by explaining his troubles finding a text appropriate for the present. He explains that he has come to see choral music as a pursuit as an anachronistic political fantasy, reliant on the possibility of social cohesiveness and agreement:

I have thought a lot about the choral work we discussed and which you so kindly offered to arrange to have commissioned. A great deal of time has been spent searching for a text and now I am beginning to feel I never will find one. Perhaps the reason is that to me, now, choral music represents a social cohesiveness and agreement about worthy goals – which I no longer see in the world we live in, except on very superficial matters – public relations and consumer goods and as I have no desire to write an advertising cantata (as Milhaud did for a paper company), I see that except for something humorous there is little for me in the project.

In refusing the commission, Carter claimed that he had thought about writing a choral work for a long time, and would have liked to, but found the chorus was not an appropriate ensemble for the modern world. It was rare for Carter to use a political statement to explain his compositions or practices. While he had numerous interactions with the government and participated in cultural diplomacy efforts, both officially and unofficially, throughout the 1950s and 60s, he rarely spoke publicly or in his letters about political matters. This letter in particular is valuable because of its wide-ranging time-span, beginning with the “lessons of the ‘40s” and continuing to the 1980s, covering almost the entire Cold War.


22 Ibid.
I see two methods of interpreting Carter’s lesson of a failed “social cohesiveness” from the 1940s. First, on an international level, Carter may have been thinking about fascism and state-sponsored social cohesion. His vision of contemporary cohesion existing only in regard to superficial matters, such as an advertising jingle, may be associated with Dwight MacDonald’s postwar critique of mass culture as an “instrument of social domination” – an argument that explored parallels between fascist and capitalist modes of social control and cultural homogenization. Nonono, however, seems to have convinced Carter that the chorus could be used in an anti-fascist manner. I propose we examine his statement through the lens of one-worldism, a philosophy which emerged at the end of the Second World War seeking the “social cohesiveness and agreement about worthy goals” that Carter described in the letter.

The “one-world” worldview emerged in the American popular consciousness near the end of the Second World War, when Americans saw the Atlantic Charter as an opportunity to revise the mistakes made in the aftermath of the First World War. Instead of returning to isolationism, which had ended with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Americans saw the bounding of America and Britain as the first step towards the creation of a new international community. As a result, the Bretton Woods agreement and the formation of the United Nations gained enormous popular and political support. However, by the end of the decade the hopes for universalism at the end of the Second

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World War faded amid the emergence of the Cold War, with Stalin replacing Hitler as America’s primary enemy. These developments and the initial intensification of the Cold War accompanied Carter’s last work for chorus, *Emblems*, in 1947. For Carter, perhaps the antagonistic mindset created by the Cold War precluded composition in the choral genre which had its premise in social cohesion and universal cooperation.

Carter continues his letter to Santen by addressing his instrumental music, which despite making use of ensembles managed to avoid any need for social cohesion through “deconstruction”:

> Being one of a crowd and expressing this in choral music is, now, I think, alien to me, writing a work that ‘deconstructs’ the choral as I have instrumental ensembles and still be within the range of American choral potentials would be to solve an arduous time-consuming puzzle, even before a note was written, and would continue to be during the entire period of composition. There are more useful and effective ways of using one’s time and energy.

I believe that Carter’s desire to “deconstruct” ensembles, by giving the instruments individual and often contrasting musical identities, aligns with concurrent political events of the Cold War that may have contributed to his acceptance of the “lessons of the 40’s.” As I will demonstrate with my analysis in the first chapter, this approach first appears in the first movement of his *Cello Sonata*, composed in 1948 at the start of the Cold War, just as he abandoned the chorus. Carter emphasized an explicit “deconstruction” of ensembles with his three compositions between 1959 and 1965 (the Second Quartet,

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Double Concerto, and Piano Concerto) aligning with the most tense period of the war (including the initial escalation of the Vietnam War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Chinese nuclear missile tests). \(^{27}\)

**What Does it Mean to be a Politically Engaged Composer**

In this dissertation I explore Carter’s works and statements from 1945 through the 1960s to argue that Carter was in fact a politically engaged composer, not only in his compositions as expressed in this letter to Santen, but also in his actions. In addition, I try to understand how this engagement played out in his development of a public career and persona. Such an argument may initially appear obvious; a great deal of recent scholarship dealing with music during the Cold War has revealed music’s function within an overarching cultural-political context. As Alex Ross writes: “The rhetoric of the early Cold War period crept into the musical discussions as into everything else. Composers exploited possibilities, annexed territory, neutralized the opposition, advanced, retreated, changed sides.” Ross continues by quoting Carter on the abandonment of neoclassicism:

> Before the end of the Second World War, it became clear to me, partly as a result of rereading Freud and others and thinking about psychoanalysis, that we were living in a world where this physical and intellectual violence would always be a problem and that the whole conception of human nature underlying the neoclassic esthetic amounted to a sweeping under the rug of things that, it seemed to me, we had to deal with in a less oblique and resigned way. \(^{28}\)

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\(^{27}\) Schiff (1998), 253-261 describes Carter’s close connection between the Piano Concerto and his experience of the Cold War in Berlin: “Carter remembers the constant sound of machine-gun fire from a US Army target range near his studio – a sound that echoes through the second movement.” Later in his description, Schiff slightly backs away from such a programmatic reading, stating “Carter’s Concerto seems non-representational,” however, he then adopts politically motivated language from the Cold War depicting opposition between the “soloist’s freedom and the “orchestra’s tyranny.”

\(^{28}\) Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 387. The Carter statement originates in Edwards, *Flawed Words*, 61. This comes after Edwards mentions Carter’s supposed earlier statement comparing neoclassicism to a masquerade in a bomb shelter, which has become significantly better known.
Despite these statements by Carter himself, his music has remained resistant to cultural-political analysis, certainly in part because of his refusal to align closely with dominant compositional trends. Of particular note here is Carter’s troubled relationship with serialism which has been seen as representative of American and/or Western Freedom.\textsuperscript{29} If Carter should be seen as a champion of anti-serialism, as Steven Mackey suggests, then it should follow that his success came in spite of governmental and academic institutions, long perceived as dominated by “serial tyranny.”\textsuperscript{30} Yet, Carter’s music did in fact receive support from these very institutions.

Indeed, Carter has drawn attention in the recent growth of Cold War scholarship through a debate regarding the role of political institutions in promoting composers. Richard Taruskin made Carter the subject of an entire chapter in his \textit{Oxford History of Western Music}, in which he dealt with issues of musical propaganda.\textsuperscript{31} Taruskin argues that Carter is emblematic of Cold War propaganda systems for his vast success in spite of his lack of a clearly defined audience. While Taruskin is correct to assert that Carter’s


\textsuperscript{30} Steven Mackey, “A Matter of Taste” \textit{The New York Times} (September 7, 1997). I will discuss the idea of a serial tyranny in greater detail in Chapter Two.

success was in part due to his support from institutions associated with Cold War
diplomatic efforts, he positions Carter as a mostly passive recipient of this promotion. He
overlooks Carter’s active engagement with government institutions, which Carter viewed
as a new kind of patron. Additionally, Taruskin, like many others, neglects the fact that
government institutions can have a legitimate role in the promotion of the arts both at
home and overseas. Too often scholars, trying to establish a critical and historical
perspective, have adopted the United States’ Cold War positioning of all propaganda as
inherently evil. When the United States government demonized propaganda, they did so
with the stipulation that the propaganda efforts of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union
could be distinguished from the dissemination of “truth,” by the United States’ own
efforts abroad. Scholars have rightfully recognized that the United States government
produced its own propaganda, but in many cases have not yet corrected the moral
judgment implicit in the use of the term.

Taruskin’s handling of Carter became the subject of a historiographical dispute
with Charles Rosen through Rosen’s review of the Oxford History for the New York
Review of Books. Rosen argues that Taruskin’s attempts to view Carter’s music from an
objective standpoint rather than advocacy results in de facto condemnation.32 In his
response to these criticisms, Taruskin explores in slightly more detail his connection
between Carter and Cold War political institutions. He argues that Carter would have had
no career if not for government intervention, and to ignore this fact is a continuation of
Cold War propaganda:

32 Charles Rosen, “From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra,” Part II, New York Review of Books 53, no. 4
(March 9, 2006).
Carter was as emblematic a figure on the one side of the Cold War divide as was, say, Tikhon Nikolayevich Khrennikov on the other. Both were well trained and highly competent makers; both produced works that defined a standard of orthodoxy—of exemplary values given a model realization—within their respective milieux; both were beneficiaries of organized prestige machines; both were insulated from negative critique; both were rewarded with every prize and perquisite of rank within the power of their respective milieux to bestow; and both enjoyed major careers and achieved true historical significance (and in Carter’s case, as he approached his hundredth birthday, genuine if relatively minor media celebrity) without having any real audience for their work. That is one of the things that the Cold War made possible. Any account of such careers that does not emphasize the role of propaganda in their maintenance is an example of that propaganda.33

For Taruskin, Rosen’s entire literary output, and especially his insistence on explicit advocacy as a part of scholarship, is a holdover from the Cold War. Rosen’s next answer, again in the New York Review of Books, argued that Carter’s fame did not originate in events sponsored by propagandistic organizations such as the Rome Festival of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, but through a variety of other, often private, activities such as the recording of the First String Quartet.34

This debate has two problems, which I attempt to address throughout this dissertation. The first concerns Carter’s involvement with governmental and associated

33 Richard Taruskin “Afterword: Nicht blutbefleckt?” Journal of Musicology 26 No. 2 (Spring 2009): 280. Carter took the issue of a ‘real audience’ seriously, and addressed it in a March 25, 1964 letter to Clifford Weber (a student asking about the state of contemporary music): “I am, for instance, not aware that there is not ‘one sympathetic listener’ to my music. In fact, I receive honors and awards from organizations that attempt to give them to artists who are considered of public interest and value. But even if this were not a criterion, I find that students from all sorts of places, even here in Berlin know my music and are interested in it and tell me how much they like it. But even if these are for the most part professionals, still the fact that my recordings sell in reasonably large numbers (for contemporary music) that my works are played by quite a number of excellent performing groups who get engagements to play them because they have [them] in their repertory must indicate something about the general public. Then there are reviews – mentions of my music by others than professionals – writers like Dwight MacDonald, etc.” Carter sought to address the apparent incongruity between strong record sales and relatively poor performance attendance by demanding a recording be included in commission arrangements for orchestral works, even offering to give up any fees if a recording could be guaranteed.

Even in saying that Carter was complicit in government propaganda efforts, Taruskin stops short of implying Carter took any role beyond allowing his music to be used in these efforts and accepting the broader exposure that accompanied them. Taruskin thus positions Carter as a passive player in Cold War propaganda, or a pawn used by groups such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom, denying the composer’s agency in being knowledgeable about and actively taking advantage of these new forms of patronage. Second, Taruskin and Rosen do not address how musical activities, whether government-sponsored, private, or somewhere in between, were often interrelated. Rosen claims that because Carter may have gained more fame through the recording of the First Quartet than through the Rome festival, Carter should be exonerated. However, he was only invited to the Rome festival because he won the Liège competition, one sponsored by the Koussevitzky foundation and the city of Liège (both independent of the American government, however international politics may have played a role). Certainly the distribution of the recording, if not its being made, was aided by these European events. A more interesting question is why, or in what circumstances should a composer take advantage of politicized institutional patronage, especially for Carter, who was independently wealthy, which enabled him to carefully select which endeavors he would participate in. Carter struggled with this precise issue when he was asked to join Aaron Copland for a State Department sponsored tour of the Soviet Union in 1960, because he recognized that he would be used as a propaganda tool. As I will show, Carter ultimately chose not to participate, not out of disagreement with governmental cultural diplomacy.

35 By associated institutions I mean organizations such as the Ford Foundation, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which were ostensibly private, yet coordinated with government efforts and, in many cases, secretly received government funds for these coordinated programs.
efforts, but because he felt that doing so would not be a valuable use of his time from a career perspective.

In this dissertation I show that he was not the passive beneficiary of Cold War propaganda as Taruskin would claim, nor the detached and innocent artist of Rosen. As I pointed out in my discussion of Carter’s letters concerning choral music, he was a composer who viewed his compositions as a means of communication, yet he wrote in a style many considered academic. In my examination of Carter’s interactions with both government and non-government institutions I focus on how he tried to take advantage of the opportunities provided to him. I show how Carter carefully crafted the public persona he put forth to appeal to diverse constituencies including patrons, government officials, music professionals, and concertgoers, all of whom formed important parts of his audience.

In the first chapter I examine Carter’s postwar change in style, one of the most dramatic and abrupt of any composer, arguing that Carter maintained and perhaps expanded his desire to communicate with his audiences and the world around him through his music. I show this through an examination of the first movement of the Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, the most important movement among his transitional works of the late 1940s. I contextualize Carter’s efforts to juxtapose the two instruments as independent characters in a drama with contemporary debates over competing approaches to modernist composition, drawing on Carter’s recent statements connecting the instruments to Schoenberg and Stravinsky. I then analyze the movement based on the juxtaposition of these two instruments, showing how Carter creates a narrative through the manipulation of not just pitch and rhythm, but also timbre, dynamics, and articulation.
In the second chapter I explore Carter’s relationship with twelve-tone methods and serialism. These methods took on significant importance during the Cold War, representative simultaneously of artistic freedom in the West and America’s scientific superiority, with proponents attempting to justify their musical thought through scientific rhetoric. At the same time, audience members were often dismissive of twelve-tone and serial compositions. While scholars have argued recently over the existence of a “twelve-tone tyranny” throughout the Cold War, Carter is perhaps unique in his ability to transcend boundaries, gaining a reputation both as one of the most important and perhaps stereotypical twelve-tone/serial composers, and also as one of the few adamantly anti-serial composers writing complex atonal music at the time. In the second chapter I explore this paradoxical aspect of Carter’s artistic identity, showing that the confusion regarding Carter’s techniques and methods stems from Carter himself, who helped to define the serial community in ways that would allow him to both be a member and an outsider as it suited his needs. I argue that Carter often used his ambiguous relationship with serialism as a means of relating to other trends around him, embracing serialism amidst the growth of aleatoric methods, and moving away from it when he adopted Eric Salzman’s category of “new virtuosity.”

In the third chapter I explore a different angle of Carter’s construction of an artistic identity, focusing on his position as an American composer and his interaction with governmental and private institutions and the contentious organizations in between. As with his development of a compositional persona in relation to serialism, Carter cultivated the image of an American composer that drew on specific tropes of American individuality and freedom, such as needing to leave New York City for the deserts of the
west to compose the First String Quartet. This narrative and the associated rejection of American audiences may have also appealed to European audiences who feared American nationalism. In his interactions with audiences, both professional and lay, and various types of institutions, Carter took great care in the presentation of his music. He showed constant awareness of the challenges of new works in the marketplace and sought to ensure the best possible reception. Through these interactions we see that Carter was not a passive beneficiary of the government’s propaganda efforts, but a careful strategist, who sought to collaborate with the government when he felt it could further his career.

As a whole, in this dissertation I shed new light on Carter’s music and biography, by revealing the many ways in which they are interrelated, an aspect of his career that has been overlooked thus far. By analyzing the Cello Sonata as a narrative through various parameters beyond pitch collections and set theory, I propose a new means of approaching Carter’s and potentially other composers’ complex atonal works from the period. By focusing on Carter’s relationships with other composers and various institutions we begin to see the complex economics of Cold War composition. During the Cold War era these issues of patronage took a central role due to the politicization of art music and the relative inability of composers to support themselves through composing alone (an issue that deserves significantly more attention than I can give it here). From this perspective, Carter becomes a fascinating case study as he bargained with numerous institutions in his efforts to construct a professional career as a composer.
Chapter 1: The Cello Sonata: Mediating Schoenberg and Stravinsky in Early Cold War America

At that time I was attracted by the idea of combining certain elements of Schoenberg’s music with elements of Stravinsky: the irregularity of expression used by the former and the rhythmic base of the latter. That was what I tried to do in those pieces, developing an idea that had its source in jazz. But I think it was most successful in my Cello Sonata.¹

Many accounts of Elliott Carter’s compositional career follow a trajectory leading from his early World-War-II-era politically conscious “Americanist” works through a transition in the late 1940s to a “self-reinvention” with the First String Quartet of 1951.² This narrative emphasizes “objectivity and rationalism” as the basis for his new style, while ignoring the Cold War context in which such seemingly apolitical values held specific political relevance as bulwarks against the “irrational” propaganda of totalitarianism. In this chapter I use an examination of the first movement of the 1948 Cello Sonata to challenge the standard image of Carter as detached and objective. I show that amid this transition we find evidence of his continuing concern for treating music as a means of expressive communication that engages with the external world. I argue that through the sonata, with its seemingly complex surface of abstract musical interactions,


² An example of this narrative is found in Paul Griffiths, Modern Music and After (Oxford University Press, 1995). Recently many scholars have begun challenging this narrative, which was derived from Carter’s own presentation of his works, allowing for either the Piano Sonata (1946) or Cello Sonata (1948) to serve as the first work in the “new style.” In part, the differing definitions stem from a lack of clarity concerning the defining characteristics of the new style.
Carter, in fact, engages cultural-political debates about the legacy of the European heritage in a culturally ascendant Cold War America. He does so by developing a self-consciously American style that confronts and assimilates the legacies of Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, America’s two most prominent musical émigrés. Thus, Carter begins to establish his position as a leading cultural diplomat by providing a framework within which the styles of the European masters can combine with American music and ideals. The Sonata then serves as an artifact that encapsulates traces of debates surrounding America’s development as a cultural superpower, especially as it negotiates a relationship with the European cultural heritage.

**The Roots of Musical Diplomacy**

As the Second World War concluded, discussions of new music turned to the future, focusing on America’s developing role as a cultural leader. Some of the first articles on this topic appeared in the final issues of the journal *Modern Music*, a prominent American journal dedicated to covering contemporary music. The New York-based *Modern Music* printed frequent articles from overseas writers to keep its readership informed about musical life in war-torn Europe. Traditionally, American composers received minimal respect abroad, but these articles provided hope for future success and recognition in European centers, which could subsequently lead to larger audiences at home. Henry Pleasants exemplified this optimism in his article on musical life in Vienna, long considered the central hub in the development of classical music, due to its status as home to Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Schoenberg. Pleasants, an American critic

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3 Before the war began Carter was briefly employed as a writer for *Modern Music*. The journal, which began as the official organ of the League of Composers, continued to target American professional musicians, before ceasing publication in late 1946.
working in Europe, described Viennese audiences as eagerly awaiting new American music: “The activities of American composers during the past ten years are… almost completely unknown here; not even the names are familiar. There is however great curiosity. Once the music becomes available there will be a ready public and willing performers.”

Other, often foreign-born, writers saw America’s forthcoming position as a cultural, in addition to economic and political, superpower as inevitable. For them *Modern Music* offered a forum where they could help to orient the direction of American composers as they took on a new global prominence. Manfred Bukofzer, a German émigré musicologist in the United States, tried to warn Americans against creating an explicitly nationalist style, positioning America as the new home not only to many musical émigrés, but also to the traditions they brought with them. In his article, he describes a progression in which American composers first copied German music and then began traveling to Europe for training; he ultimately suggested that Europeans in the future may come to America for musical studies and performances. However, he warned: “this trend will not be forced by a self-conscious nationalism, but rather by the superior artistic and economic opportunities in a country not devastated by war.” For Carter, the narrative described by Bukofzer closely reflected his own biography and goals: he belonged to an American generation trained in Paris in the 1930s, and he supported himself in part through teaching after his return to the United States. Furthermore, the

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6 As I will discuss in Chapter Three, later in his career Carter was troubled by the expectation that composers must teach to support themselves, often finding his students unprepared and taking away from
image of a war-torn Europe would have held particular intensity for Carter, who vividly remembered a trip with his father to see the ravaged battle sites of the First World War.\(^7\)

Bukofzer’s prediction that America’s compositional leadership would develop from superior conditions aligns closely with the concurrent development of the United States’ Cold War diplomatic strategies, which focused on promoting American ideals of freedom around the globe. George Kennan and Harry Truman’s worldview was based on the premise that if any nation had a free choice between democracy and communism its people would choose democracy.\(^8\) Therefore, the primary role of the United States in the early Cold War was to ensure that such decisions could be made freely. Kennan further emphasized the need to prevent the “demoralization” of populations, a mandate that set the stage for the government’s funding of overseas cultural activities as a means of satisfying America’s cultural and political ambitions. In part, this enabled the CIA to secretly fund organizations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which claimed to be a nongovernmental agency promoting culture in democratic nations.\(^9\)

During the war Carter began to position himself as a cultural diplomat through his activities working for the Office of War Information (OWI), an organization that employed numerous composers in a variety of roles, as detailed by Annegret Fauser and

\(^7\) Carter’s father frequently traveled to Europe for business, and he hoped that a tour of the battle sites would instill a belief in pacifism in his son. See Restagno, 7.

\(^8\) George Kennan first articulated the strategy of containment in his anonymous article: X, “The Sources of Soviet Conflict” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566-582.

Carter’s position within the organization involved radio programming for distribution in France. Working for the OWI, Carter saw firsthand how important cultural diplomacy efforts would be in postwar Europe. In his essay “Music as a Liberal Art,” he explained that music served an important role in establishing American propaganda efforts: “Music as a subject develops growing importance. Wartime propaganda devotes much effort to exploitation of the art. A nation’s use of music is offered to prove its advance from barbarism, its degree of culture, refinement, civilization.”

This experience with cultural diplomacy may have played directly into Carter’s decision to compose the explicitly programmatic Holiday Overture, a bombastic work celebrating the liberation of France. In 1945, the OWI began planning a festival of American music for Paris. While apparently no plans were made to include Carter’s overture, he was asked to write an article describing American musical life. These festival plans never materialized, but an outline of Carter’s essay survives. In their overview of the essay, Anne Shreffler and Felix Meyer detail how Carter attempted to construct an image of the American musical world that would appeal to Parisian tastes:

Carter mentions French institutions, such as Fontainebleau, and intends to discuss the ‘stimulating intellectual atmosphere of Paris for Americans between the wars.’ The strong emphasis on dance also seems aimed at French interests; in a text that does not name any American orchestras, Carter specifically names several ballet companies, including some that were offshoots of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

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12 Felix Meyer and Anne C. Shreffler, Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), 67. The emphasis on dance may also reflect Carter’s own work in the genre. He had already composed one ballet and would finish a second in the coming years. He also served as the music director for the Ballet Caravan (directed by Lincoln Kirstein), and he wrote about
As we can see, even in this quickly sketched outline (through dated letters, Shreffler and Meyer believe the plan was hatched in late March and cancelled in early April of 1945), Carter carefully considered how to position America as the inheritor of the French musical legacy when addressing a specifically Parisian audience.¹³

These articles and government sponsored concerts led American composers such as Carter to believe that postwar Europe held artistic opportunities previously unavailable to them. Furthermore, they believed that success in European centers would also bring new audiences and interest in the United States. However, this optimistic outlook in conjunction with the warnings concerning fears of American musical nationalism presented composers with a challenge: they were expected to develop new methods and styles for the postwar environment. Carter responded to this new environment in his writings by discussing the challenges American composers faced while trying to determine what role music would play in the postwar world. While European composers such as Boulez wrote about creating music devoid of expression through highly systematic methods that removed the composer from the resultant sound, Carter renewed dance in his articles for Modern Music. He may have believed that emphasizing American ballet as an important cultural export could lead to more opportunities in his own career, as a composer with close connections to one of the important emerging American dance companies.

¹³ Further evidence of Carter’s development as a cultural diplomat along these lines may be found in his 1950 letter to William Glock in which he declines the opportunity to write an article about new American music for The Score. Carter insists that if he were to write such an article at this point it would be too negative, so he suggests Richard Franko Goldman instead as someone who “apparently feels more hope than I do.” This refusal reflects Carter’s concern for the presentation of America’s image abroad, which is reinforced later in the letter to Glock as he states that he had been offered the presidency of both the ISCM and the League of Composers and chose to head the ISCM despite its devotion mostly to 12-tone music, “which I can stand in small doses.” See Meyer and Shreffler, 95. I will discuss these issues in greater detail in Chapter Three.
and strengthened his vision of music as a communicative art form.\textsuperscript{14} We see the first evidence of his attempts to grapple with the questions of postwar music in his January 1946 review of new music publications for the \textit{Saturday Review}: “On the basis of music printed in 1945, it is hard to predict what the dominant post-war trend in contemporary composition will be. As in every other field, people expect a change, and yet nobody seems to be able to guess what is going to happen.” Carter proposes three possibilities for immediate and dramatic change: a return of ultra-dissonance (the American ultra-modernists), the rise of a previously “out of step” group such as the impressionists, or a widespread classical revival. He then suggests that there may only be a continuation of a trend from the past decade that saw music infused with “greater plasticity and variety of feeling.” In his discussions of the new works, he focuses on their emotional content, often placing them in the context of the war: “all the varieties of anger, indignation, terror, fear, dismay, disgust, anguish, and anxiety are still frequently expressed.”\textsuperscript{15}

Carter’s emphasis on musical communication as a reflection of the world around him comes forth in his distinction between American and Soviet composers. He sees Americans refusing to adopt a ‘grand’ or ‘epic’ tone, because to do so, or to “express any feeling that lived in the certainty of present or future satisfaction” would risk “becoming epigonous [sic].” For Soviet composers Carter does not see this as a problem because they share the “high hopes of their countrymen” and do “not put as high a value on artistic originality as we do.” Carter sees both American and Soviet composers as only

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Pierre Boulez, “Schoenberg is Dead” in \textit{Notes of an Apprenticeship}, translated by Herbert Weinstock (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1968), 268-275.
\end{itemize}
capable of expressing feelings that they had experienced, meaning that the pessimistic viewpoints expressed in many Western compositions would continue. Furthermore, he perceives a desire for change among younger composers: “What is interesting about the whole picture of recent music is that among a welter of different styles of different esthetic approaches and nationalities, there has been such a close similarity of feeling. Naturally, many composers, especially young ones, have felt this as a limitation and have been on the lookout for a new repertory of feelings.” In his discussions of specific works, Carter highlights the war-time environment, comparing Peter Grimes’ treatment of his boy apprentices to Nazi treatment of “drafted slave labor” in Britten’s opera. Additionally, he sees parallels between the townsfolk’s discussions of the pathological implications of Grimes’ death in the opera and discussions of neuroses in relation to Nazi brutalities.

Carter continued his thoughts about the direction of new music in his essay, “The Composer’s Viewpoint,” for the National Music Council Bulletin in September 1946. He begins this essay by repeating his efforts to connect composition to the real world as a means of communication and expression. He claims that composers see everything as a problem and that the real goal of all composers is to write a work that is “interesting and durable.” Such durable music “stands on its own feet and says what it has to say so well that it can be heard many times with constantly growing interest and understanding.” However, Carter continues to point out that composers are not sure how to accomplish the task of writing durable music in the contemporary era: “Some cynics have claimed that this cannot be written in our time, that we have lost the knack. But just the same we

16 Ibid.
all seem hopeful, for our clamor about American music and about new music in general really betrays the desire to find and to nurture such durable music.”

I believe that Carter’s desire for a “durable music” and concerns for how this durable music may appear reflects the position of American composers detailed in the articles in *Modern Music*. He certainly thought that Americans had an unprecedented opportunity to gain prominence in both their home country and abroad, but he also recognized that to be successful he needed to find a new means of composition that could appeal across national boundaries.

Many composers and writers turned to history to help answer questions relating to how postwar composition should proceed, one of Carter’s suggestions in his review article from January of 1946. While Carter saw wide-ranging possibilities, such as the American ultra-modernists, European-centric writers saw only Schoenberg and Stravinsky, two composers who found success developing new styles after the First World War. A series of articles from 1948 in the literary journal *Partisan Review* reveals how quickly discussions turned from broad possibilities and global cooperation, as demonstrated in the *Modern Music* articles, to an intense binary conflict focusing on

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18 A third side sought to reject foreign composers, feeling that American musicians had already suffered under their dominance for too long. Mark Brunswick describes this in his January 1946 article “Refugee Musicians in America,” *Saturday Review* (January 29, 1946): 9. “Our reception of the refugee musicians was mixed. On the one hand was the extreme pro-foreign American group, and, on the other, the extreme anti. In music this situation is more acute, more revelatory of a real conflict, than in other branches of our cultural or economic life. This is largely due to the domination exercised over America’s musical activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by foreign music and musicians. There was nothing especially sinister in this – America had been weak musically, Europe was strong. Some of the by-products of the situation, however, were ludicrous. Our insecurity expressed itself in a veneration of the external trappings of foreign culture.” Brunswick continues by explaining that he feels this period has passed and musical provincialism remains in only a few colleges and universities, in his words an innately conservative setting.
these two composers, paralleling the emergence of the binary Cold War, focused on two conflicting superpowers. The debate in *Partisan Review* provides important context for my reading of Carter’s sonata as a narrative based on two juxtaposed styles, so I will analyze in detail the initial articles, which were published as Carter began thinking about his approach to composing the sonata (commissioned in 1947, but composed primarily in the second half of 1948). We will see how the language of these articles turned from music to politics, adapting the goals articulated in the 1947 Truman doctrine, which stated that the United States government would support the cause of freedom around the world. I see writers on both sides of the debate responding to this binary vision of the world as a struggle between freedom and totalitarianism by portraying their preferred method as promoting free composition and the other as mandating strict orthodoxy.

The debate began in the January issue with an article by Kurt List, an Austrian émigré seeking to champion twelve-tone composition. List begins with a vision of music history that places tonality and polyphony (counterpoint) in opposition. He describes how the generation after Bach had abandoned polyphony, resulting in an overly simplified music that dominated the 19th century:

> Though the disappearance of polyphony in the music of Bach’s sons resulted in an oversimplification of musical devices, classical music reached its fruition in so far as polyphonic characteristics were centralized by a unifying harmonic concept – tonality. But this very centralization ended by eliminating polyphony – whence one of the most important factors in the post-romantic crisis in music.\(^\text{20}\)

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19 List wrote about his fear of musicians following the Soviet populist style in a 1944 article for the journal *Politics*, quoted in Martin Brody, “‘Music for the Masses’: Milton Babbitt’s Cold War Music Theory,” *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 175. “Whether our music will succumb to the shallowness and the easy success of the present Russian style will largely depend upon the future political influence of the Soviet Union. With politicians of all shades jumping on the Russian bandwagon, it is not unexpected that musicians are following.”

While Carter discussed the problem of how to compose after the war in the abstract, List’s interpretation of music history and his claim about the suppression of polyphony allowed him to present traditional methods, in which many contemporary composers were trained, as a viable path for the future. List explains that the struggle for twentieth-century composers lay in the need to relate intertwined melodies without the vocabulary of tonality. The answer, he continues, was discovered by Schoenberg and his students. Furthermore, he politicizes their roots in Germany and Austria by claiming they suffered under Wagner, who stood in for the Nazis: “The German and Central European composers, who suffered most under the Wagnerian trauma because they had not come upon the detour into coloristic orchestration discovered by the impressionists, Debussy and Ravel were the first to find this solution.”21 By describing the discovery of twelve-tone composition as a response to suffering under a Wagnerian trauma, he places twelve-tone composition in opposition to the Nazi regime and its political use of Wagner.

List shifts rather dramatically from his historical explanation of Schoenberg’s development of twelve-tone composition and rejection by mass audiences in Germany to a discussion of contemporary music by American composers. He explains that twelve-tone composition should be viewed as a new development in America because even those who initially tried to follow Schoenberg had failed. In List’s eyes they had all succumbed to the desire to appeal to the masses:

The American composer of today can only be guided by his artistic integrity, not by any real tradition. The musical expression which suits the mass taste is the romantic cliché. At the same time modernity makes its own demands. It is no accident that many American composers began as

21 Ibid., 87.
followers of Schoenberg only to end up in romantic clichés. They could not endure the terrible isolation forced upon them.  

He proceeds to describe the styles he finds in America. Copland and Thomson rely on clichés of folk music combined with romanticism. Blitzstein injects contemporary politics into otherwise academic pieces. He views American neoclassicism, exemplified by Barber’s *Capricorn Concerto*, as a gross incongruity made by trying to artificially reconcile the contradictions between harmonic and polyphonic music. He paints John Cage’s interest in Orientalism as “escapist” and “regressive.” Finally List explains that American composers should not seek to appease their audiences, but rather their art: “The composer will finally have to shoulder the burden of the less popular, aesthetically more honest, style of atonal polyphony. He may, or may not arrive at a solution. But if music is to exist as an artistic expression of modern America, atonal polyphony is really the only valid guide.” By positioning the decision in terms of reaching popular audiences versus aesthetic and artistic honesty, List allows the debate to transition from the Second World War to the Cold War, in which oppressive and totalitarian governments force their composers to write in styles appealing to mass audiences at the expense of artistry. The American artist on the other hand could express his nation through the composition of works not beholden to popular tastes.


24 List’s expectation that artists follow artistic integrity over fame and populism parallels Adorno’s writing about Schoenberg in the postwar era. In the essay “What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts” Adorno writes: “In a deeper sense, however, the *avantgarde* represented the true societal interests against blindness, spite and conventionalism of the actual audience. The musical discord, which became the symbol of so-called *Kulturbolschewismus*, and which is the conspicuous identification mark of the musical *avant-garde*, the supposed spirit of negativism and destruction, kept faith to [sic] Beethoven’s humanism by expressing in an undiluted way the sufferings, the anguish, the fear, under which we live today long before the political crisis arose, instead of covering it up by idle comfort. It thus has maintained the link between music and
While List included some composers’ decision to follow Stravinsky’s neoclassicism instead of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system as one of many failings on the part of American composition, these competing methods were placed in stark juxtaposition two months later in an article by René Leibowitz, a French composer and leading proponent of twelve-tone composition. Like List, Leibowitz begins by presenting his vision of music history, culminating in Schoenberg’s “emancipation of dissonance.” However, he concedes that Schoenberg is not alone in his influence over contemporary music, joined by Stravinsky, his antithesis: “The history of music – and history in general for that matter – never evolves in a straight line, and it would certainly be a mistake to think that the Schoenbergian influence is the only one there is. His genuine antithesis exists, in fact, in the person of Igor Stravinsky.” Even when Leibowitz initially praises Stravinsky for innovative works such as the Rite of Spring, he takes care to place Stravinsky secondary to Schoenberg: “[Stravinsky] soon became aware of Schoenberg’s emancipation of dissonance, and so accepted it, in his own way, that now there are people who believe the Sacre du Printemps, in 1913, created the caesura in modern harmony, forgetting or not knowing that, already in 1906, Schoenberg had drawn more radical conclusions.” Thus Stravinsky’s innovations only seemed important and original to listeners unfamiliar with Schoenberg’s earlier developments.


26 Ibid., 362.
Leibowitz again follows List’s lead in his depiction of younger composers following Stravinsky: “The sacrifice of arbitrary and hedonistic attitudes which Schoenberg demands is difficult for most musicians. Hence, many of them who want to be ‘modern’ or ‘advanced’ find it easier to follow Stravinsky.” Again, the options appear to be either artistry through following the path laid out by Schoenberg or hedonism/fame from emulating Stravinsky. Leibowitz continues by explaining why he perceives Stravinsky’s path as untenable for young American composers: “Wasn’t the first performance of the Sacre du Printemps one of the biggest “scandals” in musical history? But from the very beginning Stravinsky’s work has been outside the great tradition. Even in his boldest works, the segments, themes, sections are simply juxtaposed rather than organically developed.” 27 Thus, Stravinsky and the composers who follow his style may be dismissed as outside the tradition that American composers were trying to adopt in the postwar environment, and those who continued to emulate Stravinsky’s methods would be perpetuating America’s musical provincialism.

By the end of the article Leibowitz again returned to the Rite of Spring, completing a transformation from positioning the work as an influential and important piece adopting Schoenberg’s atonal writing to one that sought to destroy the Western tradition: “his works continue, one after the other, the destructive process he began in 1912, and which has become more and more open. These works are brilliantly made as far as craftsmanship goes and every note seems to be the result of absolute lucidity. But behind these frozen and sometimes readymade patterns there is nothing except perhaps

27 Ibid.
the illusion of music.”

Leibowitz positions Stravinsky as a craftsman instead of an artist, not taking advantage of the artistic freedom available to Western and especially American composers. Schoenberg, on the other hand, takes advantage of his new position, continuing to produce masterworks reflecting the changing world around him: “Every new work has an absolute novelty of its own. The wild and utterly fresh features of the *Survivor from Warsaw* (this complex score was composed in a week), demonstrate a vitality and creative strength which are almost inconceivable: it is frankly a masterpiece.” Such a depiction of Schoenberg was designed to resonate with composers such as Carter who continued to view music as a means of communication, and perhaps hesitated to adopt twelve-tone methods fearing that such methods transformed art into craft.

A response defending Stravinsky appeared two months later, in the May issue, penned by Nicholas Nabokov. Nabokov worked with the United States Army Psychological Warfare division in Berlin after the war, mostly giving up his compositional career. He was responsible for denazification efforts on behalf of important musical figures, and he began to seek a position in the Central Intelligence Agency. For this reason, his statements within the debates should be viewed equally as musical and political statements. He begins the article with the simple declaration that: “Atonality or Dodecatonalism as a system of musical composition is, as everyone knows,

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28 *Ibid.*, 364. Leibowitz’s depiction of Stravinsky’s music as “frozen” adopts language from Adorno’s description of music under Nazi rule: “The most important characteristic of musical life under Hitler seems to me a complete stagnation, a ‘freezing’ of all musical styles of composing and performing and of all standards of criticism, comparable to the freezing of wages under Hitler” (*Adorno, National Socialism and the Arts*).

a product of Central Europe. As such, it had from the outset the earmarks of a Messianic cult and a deterministic religion.” In this construction, Nabokov draws on lingering wartime xenophobia, especially through his emphasis on the supposed dubiousness of the method’s Central European provenance rather than on Schoenberg as a figure.  

While List and Leibowitz may have used rhetorical strategies connected with Adorno’s critique of music in Nazi Germany, I see Nabokov as looking to America’s postwar embrace of science and technology as the basis for his championing of Stravinsky. Thus, Nabokov repositions the twelve-tone system as a natural progression from earlier chromaticism:

They are rather a theoretical conclusion drawn from a development of harmony which began at the turn of the seventeenth century and tortuously but steadily moved on to the beginning of the twentieth century. By basing his whole system on the independent and autonomous use of the twelve semitones within the limit of an octave, Schoenberg, in effect, has renounced any possibility of an organic foundation for the selection of musical materials. It becomes evident that Schoenberg stands at the end of a period rather than at the beginning of a new one. His system is the result of a gradual ‘emancipation of dissonance,’ over a period of several hundred years and not a deus ex machina invention of his own.  

Nabokov approaches the twelve-tone system as a simple and expected advancement in the science of musical composition, and therefore not especially noteworthy. Thus, even if his use of dissonance pre-dates the Rite of Spring, that is of little importance because Stravinsky’s innovations moved beyond this straightforward progression.

While Leibowitz positioned Stravinsky’s Russian roots outside of the European tradition, Nabokov used Stravinsky’s Russian heritage to draw connections with the same lost polyphonic tradition that List found in the twelve-tone system: “Stravinsky, free from

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31 Ibid., 583.
the burden of a declining tradition, has been able to re-establish ties with the true polyphonic thinking of the eighteenth-century tradition.” Nabokov continues by positioning Stravinsky’s innovations in scientific terms, focusing not on harmony, but on time, which took on a new malleable meaning in the wake of Einstein’s relativity:

Stravinsky is not concerned with the further evolution of harmony, but with the problem of musical time and its measurement, the function of the interval, the extension of a phrase, the juxtaposition in time of several melodic lines. The whole question of time+space+linear and chordal harmony which creates the fourth dimension of music-rhythm- is the real preoccupation of Stravinsky’s art. In this, Stravinsky is a real innovator, akin to Monteverde [sic], who also stood at the beginning of a new cycle in musical history.32

In using scientific language, even if incomprehensibly, Nabokov draws on a developing trend in efforts to justify postwar American music to government and private institutions, which saw America’s victory in the Second World War and primary strength in the Cold War through scientific breakthroughs such as the atomic bomb.33 Thus, this entire debate must be reconfigured and re-read as a specifically Cold War narrative, in which each side seeks to claim linguistic territory based on the new values that would come to define the American compositional landscape and its significance as a political commodity.

Analyzing the Cello Sonata: Musically and Culturally

In approaching these debates, Carter probably questioned why one must choose between Stravinsky and Schoenberg. He had heard and loved the music of both composers long before learning anything about their techniques and methods. In his


33 Aaron Gerard discusses the efforts by Milton Babbitt and others in the Princeton music department to emulate the structure of the physics department as a means of self-promotion. See Aaron Gerard, “Music as a (Science as a) Liberal Art at Princeton,” Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie (Sonderausgabe 2010).
mind, both managed to produce durable and expressive music, precisely what he and his contemporaries sought to do. Despite his interest in the subject of these debates, Carter chose not to add yet another article. My contention is that he staked out a musical position in the debates through his composition of the first movement of his 1948 Cello Sonata, based on the juxtaposition and interaction of the two composer’s styles. He recalled trying to combine their styles in an interview for the 2004 biographical film *A Labyrinth of Time*:

> Of course one of the things that interested me first on hearing the early work of Stravinsky was hearing the remarkable rhythmic power of the work. It was irregular although constantly in this sharp rhythmic accentuation. What interested me, however, in the Schoenberg music and in the Alban Berg music was exactly the opposite. They were trying to make a kind of musical prose. They were not trying to make some kind of an irregular accentuation, but rather as the way people talk. When I finally began to think a lot about this in the 40s I finally wrote a cello sonata in which I tried, especially in the first movement, to have the piano play the Stravinsky type of thing and the cello play the Schoenberg type of thing, which was a romantic kind of thing against a clock-like rhythm in the piano.  

The contribution of a composition rather than an article to the debate reflects Carter’s preference to communicate through music instead of words. For example, when asked to participate in a panel on “The Composer in Academia” by the College Music Society in 1970, Carter responded: “I have already answered all questions and problems relating to this subject in my music and my presence, personal appearance and verbal statements can add nothing.”

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34 *Elliott Carter: A Labyrinth of Time*, DVD, directed by Frank Scheffer (2006; New York: Ideale Audience International). Carter has never gone into much more detail regarding his specific interpretation of their styles for the movement.

purely musical terms, and if successful doing so would provoke reflection and discussion instead of the highly partisan polemics that dominated magazines and journals.

For most of his career, however, even if he felt that he was contributing to debates such as this between Stravinsky and Schoenberg through his composition, Carter tried to hide these extramusical aspects of his works. He never mentioned a connection between the Cello Sonata and Stravinsky and Schoenberg before the Restagno interview in the late 1980s. On the contrary, in the 1968 interview with Benjamin Boretz he described the narrative process I envision but without the connection to the outside world:

After the first measure, the piano starts a regular beat, like a clock ticking, against which the cello plays an expressive melodic line in an apparently free manner without any clear coordination with the piano beat. This establishes the two completely different planes of musical character. The entire form of this piece then consists of bringing these two instruments into various relationships with one another. There are developments, continuations, of this contrast between the two instruments, not, in this particular case, so much in terms of intervallic structure, but more in oppositions of character. So the piano and the cello are kept distinct throughout most of the work. I don’t know how the conception ever originated; it was actually the first time I had ever had the idea.

Based on these statements I propose an analysis focusing on the ways in which Carter initially juxtaposes the instrumental lines and then proceeds to have them interact. By treating Carter’s statement connecting the two composers to the instrumental lines as the premise for my analysis of the work, I do not intend to suggest that all aspects of the music are derived from their styles, but rather that they serve as a framework for a

36 Carter also complained that Restagno published the interview before undergoing the traditional editing process Carter used in long interviews. It is possible that this connection may be something that he would have taken out later if given the chance.

musical narrative in a manner similar to how poetry and film provided inspiration for many of his later compositions.\textsuperscript{38}

**Figure 1.1:** Cello Sonata, Piano measures 6-10. Arrows indicate beats which are accented by including three simultaneous pitches

Carter draws a relatively straightforward connection with Stravinsky through the piano’s incessantly repeating quarter notes and irregular accent pattern, reminiscent of the “Augurs of Spring” from the *Rite of Spring*. Carter, however, creates the irregular accent pattern through texture and register (figure 1.1), rather than through accent markings as done by Stravinsky. I have marked with arrows the four locations containing three simultaneous pitches. These four locations all also include local registral extremes, both the highest and low pitches within their respective measures. Finally, they all contain consonant harmonies (major/minor chords or an open fifth), which produce a strong accent within the generally atonal environment.\textsuperscript{39}

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\textsuperscript{38} Carter has pointed to James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* as a model for the Cello Sonata, connecting the circularity of the novel which begins and ends in the middle of the same sentence to the circularity of the cello sonata in which each movement ends with material related to the beginning of the next and the final movement ends with a return to the material of the opening with the instruments switched. There are similar relationships between film and the First Quartet and poetry and the Double Concerto, almost always dealing with the beginning and ending of compositions.

\textsuperscript{39} This was the first movement in his oeuvre in which Carter did not use a key signature.
Carter’s evocation of Schoenberg does not seem to rely on a single seminal work by the composer, but rather a combination of Schoenberg’s techniques and Carter’s general impression of Schoenberg’s “irregularity of expression,” as he described to Enzo Restagno. I believe Carter tries to emulate this irregularity through the cello’s constantly changing dynamics and free/improvisatory performance markings in conjunction with its irregular rhythmic patterns. Carter also connects the cello line to Schoenberg through references to the twelve-tone system. While he does not use traditional twelve-tone methods, Carter draws a connection between Schoenberg’s system and the cello line through his manipulation of the chromatic collection. As seen in figure 1.2, the first pitch in the cello line completes the chromatic collection from the piano introduction. For Carter, this division and emphasis on the entire chromatic collection served as a means of referencing the twelve-tone system, as he discussed in his 1946 analysis of Walter Piston’s First Symphony. In the article Carter points to Piston’s use of twelve-tone techniques by placing nine pitches in the bass and the remaining three in the

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40 Restagno, 36.
The cello also completes a second chromatic collection, created by combining the pitches from its first phrase (mm. 6-21) and the F-sharp played by the piano as the cello begins. The larger phrases of the cello line may also be seen as drawing on twelve-tone methods by repeating the same pitch classes in the same order but altering register and rhythm, as seen comparing measure 6-16 and 23-32 in figures 1.3a and 1.3b.

**Figure 1.3a: Cello Sonata, Cello line measures 6-16**

![Figure 1.3a](image)

**Figure 1.3b: Cello Sonata, Cello line measures 23-32**

![Figure 1.3b](image)

In my analysis of the work I will focus on Carter’s efforts to create an interaction between these two initially juxtaposed instrumental characters. We will see that he divides the two hands of the piano allowing the right hand to begin emulating aspects of the cello character while the left hand maintains the strict pattern set out in the beginning. After reaching a point of near-unity, the relationship reverts back to the original juxtaposition and the cello begins to adopt strictness from the piano in the form of a

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41 Elliott Carter, “Walter Piston” *The Musical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1964): 364. Reprinted in *WEC*, 131. Two other composers who viewed chromatic completions as a connection with the twelve-tone method are William Schuman and Roy Harris, as demonstrated by the work of Steve Swayne and Beth Levy, respectively. Walter Frisch has pointed to Schoenberg’s early use of the complete chromatic collection as early as the 1894 Piano Piece in A Minor (Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg 1893-1908* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 24).
metric modulation. The process of the piano gradually imitating the cello repeats again at the end of the first A section. The B section offers a different version of the narrative by having each instrument perform a solo, but again results in a convergence. Therefore, I see the entire movement revolving around a narrative of convergence between the two characters, showing that each may maintain its own style while adopting characteristics from the other. When read through the debates concerning Stravinsky and Schoenberg, I believe that the composition reveals one of Carter’s earliest attempts to express in music that which he felt he could not in words (as described above in the letter about participating in the College Music Society panel). Amid these polemical debates, Carter saw a shared set of musical values underneath their disparate surfaces.

In conceiving of a movement that juxtaposes the two composers, Carter grappled with the complex web of cultural and political debates that would come to define America’s identity as a cultural superpower. Thus, my analytical focus on treating the two instruments as independent characters engaged in a narrative enables the sonata to stand in for Carter’s nuanced statement in the contemporary debates over the future of American music while avoiding the highly polemical nature of print at the time. Furthermore, exploring the middle ground between the styles and ultimately having the two instruments switch parts, allows the sonata to parallel a post-war vision of America that welcomed numerous émigrés, and promised the possibility of merging their culture with America’s to create a new culturally and politically ascendant superpower that embraced the past while looking into the future.
This musical-cultural analysis of the work complements a long tradition of music-theoretical analyses, which have often sought as their primary purpose a means of identifying repeated abstract pitch collections, effectively smoothing the dissonance between the instruments. In Matthew Brown and Douglas Dempster’s seminal article “The Scientific Images of Music Theory” they delineate two types of analytical philosophies: the scientific approach, claiming: “it is only by applying scientific paradigms to well-defined phenomena, that music theory can be truly explanatory,” and the “other” approach, which believes that “the ultimate purpose of analysis is not to find general laws about music or specific types of music, but rather to individuate unique masterpieces.”42 Current analyses of the Cello Sonata’s first movement by Christopher Kies, David Schiff, and Jonathan Bernard all fall within the scope of Dempster and Brown’s first category, using set theory to find repeated collections (figure 1.4 reprints a portion of Bernard’s analysis to demonstrate how these work).43 These analyses succeed


in the scientific realm of connecting what are often considered anti-serial methods and individualist Carter to larger contemporary trends in composition. However, they do not explain what makes the piece unique, as evidenced by the fact that all three analysts approached it through a similar methodology and found strikingly different results, with no attempt to argue why one approach should take favor over the others. Looking at Bernard’s example, we see that he makes no distinction between those collections limited to a single voice, and those that incorporate both instruments. See for example the collection 4-17, one of the most common appearing five times in these six measures. Twice it incorporates both instruments and both hands of the piano, once only the cello, once only the right hand of the piano, and once the two hands of the piano together. Furthermore, Bernard provides little insight into the meaning of the correspondences in the overall unfolding of the piece. In my analysis I will show that this major-minor tetrachord plays an important role as one of the tetrachords that combines a triad with a minor second, a sonority which I believe Carter tried to emphasize.

To explore the relationship between the two instruments and its development over time, I propose an analysis based on consonance and dissonance, which I expand to include a variety of musical features beyond pitch. I take Charles Seeger’s idea of dissonant counterpoint as a conceptual basis for exploring how to compare levels of

Movement of Elliott Carter’s *Sonata for Violincello and Piano* in Light of Certain Developments in 19th and Early 20th-Century Music” Ph.D. diss. (Brandeis University, 1984). These analyses are also interesting in connection to Carter’s *Harmony Book*, providing evidence of his conception of music in those terms significantly earlier than we previously thought. Further evidence of this was pointed out to me in the sketch material at the Library of Congress by Steve Soderberg.

Both Schiff and Kies focus on hexachords, however their hexachords are different. Schiff’s hexachord is particularly problematic because he claims it is derived from the first measure of the work, which may only be true if there is a typo in the book (this typo remains in the second edition). Schiff does not provide any detail concerning the use of this hexachord throughout the movement. Kies does trace pitch sets throughout the entire movement in an attempt to connect Carter’s use of pitch sets to the use of collections by earlier composers. In doing so, he shows that Carter often deviates from pitch collections in order to create a narrative.
consonance and dissonance in these other aspects of music. Dissonant counterpoint served as a means for Seeger, along with Henry Cowell and Ruth Crawford, to explore methods of ordering and controlling musical resources by reversing the rules of traditional counterpoint.\(^{45}\) In doing so, they expanded beyond pitch to experiment with dissonance as it could relate to other musical parameters including rhythm, timbre, and dynamics. The results focused primarily on degrees of similarity and difference as representing consonance and dissonance, respectively. Seeger’s full treatise on the idea was never published in his lifetime, but he introduced the concept and outlined means through which one can measure levels of dissonance between instrumental lines in his 1930 article for *Modern Music* “On Dissonant Counterpoint.”\(^{46}\) The concept was also included in Henry Cowell’s *New Musical Resources*, a book that Carter has often cited as important in the development of his musical thought.\(^{47}\) In taking the principles of defining dissonance from Seeger’s theory, I am not proposing a reading of the sonata as a work in dissonant counterpoint, which inverts the meanings of consonance and dissonance (making dissonance the stable and desirable relationship between voices), but rather that it may inform how we can interpret rhythmic, dynamic, and timbral relationships.\(^{48}\) Dissonant counterpoint here serves as a theoretical framework for


\(^{48}\) While I have found no evidence of Carter discussing dissonant counterpoint, he probably encountered the idea in both of these sources. In Seeger’s discussion of rhythm in *Modern Music*, his differentiation between degrees of rhythmic dissonance includes a metric modulation, notated as Carter would in the Cello Sonata and his later works.
describing the interactions between two lines according to a wider variety of parameters than are covered in standard analyses (Bernard, Kies, and Schiff all limit their discussions primarily to pitch and to a lesser degree rhythmic phenomena).

**Unit 1 (Measures 6-11)**

As a means of detailing how this narrative works out musically, I divide the movement into short, relatively confined units, based primarily on rhythmic characteristics. Unit 1, which begins with the entrance of the cello in measure 6, establishes a standard mode of performance for each instrument, producing an opposing relationship between them through numerous parameters. As such, I will describe the workings of unit 1 in the greatest detail. In my discussion of the other units I will often refer back to here as a means of demonstrating how characteristics from one instrument in unit one may be combined or adapted to the character of the other instrument, which forms the basis of the piece’s narrative of their interaction.

The fundamental opposition between the instruments in unit one is expressed through a combination of rhythm, and what I call performance style, which includes a variety of playing instructions that have implications for rhythm, articulation, and dynamics. Together, these musical characteristics give the cello an expressive and free character against a piano that sounds strict and measured. More specifically, the piano line has only the marking *staccato sempre*, along with dots over the first few notes of each hand (the right hand in measures 4 and 5 and the left in measures 6 and 7),

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49 Terminology using “freedom” to describe the cello line has become rather standard, although its connection with Cold War discourse has been overlooked.
reiterating the prose label.\textsuperscript{50} Contrasting the precise markings in the piano part, the cello begins with two distinct markings \textit{espressivo-quasi rubato} and \textit{cantabile}. These terms are all rather vague when applied to actual performance. For example, one can not easily distinguish between \textit{cantabile} and \textit{espressivo}, often the instruction \textit{cantabile} in instrumental music translates to a greater level of expression. \textit{Quasi rubato} similarly suggests a degree of uncertainty with regard to rhythm, ultimately leaving a great deal up to the performer in how to play the line. These markings of freedom in the performance of the cello line contrast with the straightforward piano label that demands all notes be played not only short, but equally so. In addition to these stylistic markings, which imply some degree of fluctuation of dynamics for the cello, Carter writes a brief \textit{crescendo} and \textit{decrescendo} in measures 9 and 10 creating further contrast with the sparse and unchanging dynamics of the piano quarter notes.\textsuperscript{51}

Carter strengthens the strict versus free relationship of the instruments through their contrasting rhythms. The piano rhythm remains constant throughout, consisting of only quarter notes that are struck on every beat (as I discussed with regard to figure 1.1, there is some variety through texture). The cello on the other hand seems entirely free rhythmically. Its pitches change only on eighth-note subdivisions of the beat, and those notes are held for a variety of durations, making the line sound unpredictable.

\textsuperscript{50} The piano introduction, which I will not discuss in detail, begins in the relatively free style that I argue defines the cello (varied dynamics, slurs, and accents), but gradually works its way into the mode of the piano for this first part, and Carter assures this transition through the marking \textit{“un poco incisivo.”}

\textsuperscript{51} The dynamic levels of the instruments begin rather similar, \textit{mezzo piano} for the cello and \textit{piano} for the piano, but this may be attributed more to the realities of performance than a consonance. When one instrument begins extraordinarily loud and the other soft, the soft instrument risks not being heard. Thus, Carter creates dissonance in dynamics through contrasting an instrument which changes levels with one that remains constant.
Furthermore, the aforementioned *quasi rubato* marking tells the performer not to change notes always on exact subdivisions, avoiding a strict sense of syncopation.

On the surface, pitch content supports the opposition between the two instruments, although it does so in more nuanced ways, anticipating how the relationship will develop throughout the movement. In my analysis of pitch I refer primarily to tonal relationships of consonance and dissonance, although rarely does the movement make use of large-scale functional tonality. Instead, I will discuss three primary means with which Carter uses tonal relationships and references to vary the interactions between the instruments. First, the use of both major and minor triads, some of which I already pointed out in my discussion of accent patterns in the piano. As a means of creating extreme dissonance, all of these triads in the piano are accompanied by a semitone related pitch in the cello (some of which create the major-minor tetrachord I discussed with regard to Bernard’s analysis).\(^{52}\) Second, Carter frequently spells pitches so that harmonic consonances become dissonances as augmented or diminished intervals. Neither instrument retains consistent accidentals. Instead, the two often switch with one instrument playing sharps while the other plays flats, a phenomenon I call enharmonic dissonance. Third, the instruments converge harmonically when viewed horizontally, often playing harmonic material similar to what the other instrument had just played. All three of these pitch functions set up a relationship that allows the instruments to converge in various manners.

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\(^{52}\) This is another area where I feel traditional set theory approaches are insufficient, as they do not recognize the commonality between these sonorities which fall under multiple distinct labels: [0137], [0147], [0148], [0158], and [0347].
One of the primary means of bridging the divide between the instruments is a division of the left and right hands of the piano. Throughout the first few units of the movement, the right hand becomes increasingly similar to the cello, while the left hand remains constant, a series of developments foreshadowed by the triad in measure 6 (note that in this unit it is the right hand playing constant quarter notes while the left hand often has rests). In the B-flat minor chord, seen in figure 1.5, the right hand plays an open fifth, while the left fills in the third. When considered without the left hand, the right hand fifth and the cello D natural create a B-flat major triad, an alternative consonant harmony. As listeners, however, we are drawn to hear the cello as the dissonant note due to a combination of timbre (the instrument playing the pitches), register (the cello note is many octaves below the others), and rhythm (the piano triad all appears simultaneously while the cello pitch begins before and continues after the triad). Thus, instead of hearing this as a moment of convergence between the cello and the right hand of the piano we hear it as a dissonance with a semitone relationship [0347] between the two instruments.

53 The F-sharp on the downbeat of measure 6, which I discussed earlier as the completion of a full chromatic collection with the cello line, may also be considered a means of foreshadowing the developing similarity between the right hand and the cello.
Measure 7 expands the concept of a triad in the piano and a pitch a half-step away in the cello by placing it throughout the whole measure. While I pointed specifically to the third beat as a location of textural emphasis, it contains only the perfect fifth. The third of the chord, E, appears on the fourth beat of the measure, which otherwise consists entirely of Cs and Gs. Throughout the entire measure the cello holds a C-sharp, which begins in the end of measure 6 and continues into measure 8. Unlike the measure 6 chord, in this case both hands of the piano create dissonance with the cello, and this dissonant relationship with both hands continues through the remainder of the unit. On the third beat of measure 8, the cello plays E natural against a B-flat major triad – a semitone relationship with the right hand and a tritone with the left. In measure 10 (in example 6), the piano plays a D-flat minor triad against a cello C-natural, creating a third variation on the triad versus semitone sonority. This time, the cello and the right hand form a semitone, while the cello and the left hand form a diminished fourth, an enharmonic dissonance.

Enharmonic dissonances begin almost immediately after the cello enters in measure 6. On the fourth beat of the measure the piano plays an A-flat against the D of the cello, a tritone. In the middle of the beat the cello drops a half step to a C-sharp. This creates a sounding perfect fifth, a consonance, spelled as a diminished sixth. The repeated phenomenon of enharmonic dissonance throughout the movement provides a visual sense of dissonance, for the performers or readers of the score by juxtaposing sharps played by one instrument with flats played by the other. The use of visual dissonance juxtaposed with aural consonance approximates the paradoxical position of Carter within the
Stravinsky/Schoenberg debates, reading about the differences between the two composers, while hearing correspondences in their music.

The third pitch phenomenon that contributes to creating a dynamic relationship between the two instruments takes place over time, with the instruments’ pitch material often crossing paths. Measures 7 and 8 provide an example of this (see figure 1.5 again). As I already described, throughout measure 7 the piano outlines a C major triad against the cello’s sustained C-sharp. On the downbeat of measure 8 the piano moves to F-sharp and B-natural, suggesting a closer relationship to the C-sharp, which is reinforced by the fifth C-sharp and F-sharp at the end of the measure. Immediately after the downbeat of measure 8, however, the cello moves into the C-major realm, first with an E natural and then a C natural. Thus, the measure ends with both instruments playing consonant harmonies in relation to the other instrument’s previous measure (I drew lines in figure 1.5 to show this crossing). Just as the cello C ends in the middle of measure 10, the piano moves to its own C natural. This C-natural creates a descending A-flat major arpeggio, beginning with the C in the cello. The arpeggio then moves to the right hand with the A-flat atop the piano’s D-flat major triad followed by E-flat and C. Finally it moves into the left hand with A-flat and E-flat in measure 11 (see figure 1.6). However, by the time the piano has re-interpreted C natural as the major third of a new chord, the cello has moved on to A-natural, a semitone away from the root of the new triad, juxtaposing a melodic connection between the instruments with harmonic dissonance.
The first unit of the sonata sets up a complex relationship between the two instruments. On one hand, they play material that seems to exist in opposite worlds with no relationship to each other, as seen in my discussion of stylistic characteristics and rhythm. On the other hand, pitch content reveals greater nuances and allows Carter to continue the clear dissonance between the instruments while foreshadowing future developments in which they explore common ground.

Unit 2 (Measures 12-19)

Both the piano and the cello line have significant rhythmic changes in the second unit which distinguishes their material from the first. In unit one the cello line consisted entirely of notes that began and ended on eighth-note subdivisions of the beat and generally those notes were held for long durations, ranging from 3 to 8 beats. In the second unit all of the notes begin and end on triplet divisions of the beat, and durations tend to be shorter (some longer notes are interspersed throughout, such as the E-flat of measure 15). While the left hand of the piano takes over the steady stream of quarter notes, the right hand rhythmically and stylistically begins to integrate aspects of the cello’s character. The right hand notes still only begin and end on beats, but they are held
for significantly longer durations, much like the cello line from the first unit. From a
stylistic standpoint, Carter includes a long slur marking over the right hand’s entire
phrase, suggesting something closer to the espressivo and cantabile of the opening cello
part. Carter emphasizes the different playing styles for the two hands of the piano through
a return of the staccato markings over individual notes of the left hand.

The shorter note durations in the cello line allow the instrument to take on a more
active harmonic role, as exemplified in measure 14 (figure 1.7). The cello begins the
measure with a descending B-flat minor triad followed by a step up to C natural, the same
pitch class that preceded the triad. This combination suggests an F-minor tonal region
with B-flat and C. Against this motion, the right hand of the piano takes on the role of
creating enharmonic dissonance through a sustained G-sharp. If the pitch were spelled as
an A-flat it would reinforce the F-minor sound and create a series of consonances with 3
of the 4 cello pitches – a minor third followed by a Perfect fifth, a minor seventh (the
only dissonance and relatively speaking a weaker dissonance), and a minor sixth.
However, spelled as a G-sharp, they are all augmented intervals. While the G-sharp
spelling aligns with the left hand of the piano, the two hands together create a series of
aural dissonances with a major second on beat two and a semitone on beat three. Thus,
the right hand visually aligns with the left hand of the piano and aurally aligns with the
cello.54

In measure 15 the cello moves from C-natural to E-flat, where it begins a similar
pattern, suggesting a move to A-flat. This may be read as either a case of the instruments
misaligning – reaching A-flat after the right hand of the piano had completed the held G-

54 The piano dissonance is especially harsh here because the left hand briefly plays in the same register as
the right in measure 14.
sharp, or further use of enharmonic dissonance – note that the right hand of the piano continues to play sharps against the cello’s flats (figure 1.7). In measure 16, the left hand of the piano becomes increasingly dissonant in relation to the cello. The D-natural on beat four creates first a tritone and then a semitone with A-flat and E-flat respectively, a return to the sonority of a chord (although here incomplete) juxtaposed with a pitch a semitone away that was so prominent in unit 1. Unit 2, then, contains primarily an expansion of ideas found in unit 1, with the right hand of the piano beginning to take up a role between the cello and the left hand, which remain dissonant in relation to each other.

**Figure 1.7: Cello Sonata, Measures 12-16**

In measure 18, the transition to unit three, the cello and right hand finally do converge briefly in pitch even if not yet in rhythm (figure 1.8). The cello maintains an F-natural throughout the entire measure while the right hand of the piano plays C, F, B-flat, and D all consonant and spelled as such. The misspellings in this case are between the two hands of the piano with a C-sharp against the right hand’s B-flat and an F-sharp against the right hand’s F-natural. The correspondence between cello and right hand remains incomplete, however, because the right hand in this measure returns to the *staccato* quarter notes.
The harmonic convergence in the transition ending unit 2 anticipates the right hand of the piano taking on even more characteristics from the cello line in unit 3. In the middle of measure 19 the right hand is labeled *espressivo*, half of the performance marking for the cello at the opening. Similarly, the right hand begins to follow the cello rhythmically, changing notes on eighth-note divisions of the beat. This creates another manner in which the right hand of the piano mixes elements from the freedom of the cello and the strictures of the piano at the opening (or the left hand now). While more free than previously, the piano’s note lengths do not vary as much as the cello’s had, only lasting either 2 and a half or 3 and a half beats, resulting in an alternation between notes beginning on beats and on subdivisions.

When the right hand of the piano begins playing these varied rhythmic values it also establishes a new means of connecting with the cello through pitch, copying the last three pitches from the cello line (figure 1.9). The first long cello phrase ends in measures 18-21 with the rising line E-flat, F, G. The right hand of the piano copies these pitch classes exactly beginning in measure 19. This case differs from previous instances where a tonal area moved from one instrument to the other because here the cello holds its G so
that the two end simultaneously. This ending marks the first convergence between the instruments in both pitch and rhythm, with the two Gs ending simultaneously.

Figure 1.9: Cello Sonata, Measures 17-21 imitative rising line and simultaneous ending

Figure 1.10: Cello Sonata, Measure 25-6

Unit 4 (Measures 25-32)

The *staccato* quarter notes played by the piano on every beat since measure three finally end on the last beat of measure 26, creating a sense of cadence after a feeling of acceleration caused by the right hand syncopations, while the cello continues to hold an E begun 2 measures earlier (figure 1.11). 55 This silence starting unit four helps to define the

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55 In Measure 25 the *staccato* marking for the piano quarter notes changes to *marcato*, a subtle difference that suggests the greater change coming for the left hand. The character of the line, however, does not significantly change yet as the shortened quarter notes remain the defining feature even if they are not
new section, which incorporates the first deviations from the steady quarter notes, as the left hand becomes slightly more like the cello in character (although not nearly as much as the right hand had in unit 3). Amidst this change, the left hand is again joined by the right, stressing the enormity of the impact of eliminating the steady pulse, even though musically it remains much more similar to the piano line of unit 1 than the cello due to the division into very short ideas separated by brief rests.

Figure 1.11: Cello Sonata, Measures 27-29

Unlike other units, which immediately introduced new characters, in this section the piano changes gradually. In measure 27, both hands together play an eighth note followed by a stream of syncopated quarter notes through the rest of the measure. This combines the initial character of the piano, repeating quarter notes, with the off-beat note changes from the cello in section one, translating the strictures of the piano into a new context. In measures 28 and 29 the piano hands change to a series of dotted quarter notes, a new rhythmic value accompanying a new means of expression for the left hand with a long slur over the series of notes beginning in the second half of measure 28. These shortened quite as much. The change may also be felt in the first dynamic alteration for the left hand, the crescendo.
changes in the piano accompany the beginning of the second long phrase by the cello, which returns to its original pitch material and rhythms consisting of long held notes changing on off-beats and rests (this is the first time the cello has included rests).  

**Figure 1.12: Cello Sonata, Sketch of metric plan, Elliott Carter Collection, Library of Congress**

Unit 5: Metric Modulation (Measures 33-42)

One of the reasons the Cello Sonata is often considered the beginning of Carter’s new style is its use of metric modulation, a technique that has become closely associated with Carter and appears here for the first time. Carter went to great lengths to work out methods of moving between tempos in individual movements of the sonata and to relate

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56 While the movement is generally considered to have an ABA form, I believe it may also be seen as AABA with this beginning the second A section.

57 Metric modulation involves a change from one tempo to another while maintaining a note value, in this case a quarter note in the first tempo becomes equal to a quintuplet quarter note in the new tempo.
the movements to each other, allowing material that appears across movements to maintain speeds. Evidence of this care may be found throughout the sketches, where calculations concerning tempo relationships are found in the margins of many pages. In figure 1.12 I reproduce a page from the sketches, written on a hotel notepad, in which Carter outlines relationships for the whole sonata writing at the top that is “mathematically OK,” although these relationships are not in all cases the same as those found in the final work.

**Figure 1.13: Cello Sonata, Measures 33-41 (metric modulation)**

![Musical notation]

Even though he composed the first movement last, the position of its metric modulation as the first that performers of the work would ever see and listeners would ever hear may explain why it is relatively simple, and in fact almost entirely unnecessary. In measure 33, preparing for the modulation, Carter changes the time signature from 4/4
to 5/4 while maintaining the same speed (see figure 1.13). To modulate, the time signature returns to 4/4 while maintaining the length of measures rather than the length of quarter notes as done before. This means that the quarter notes in the 5/4 tempo would be equivalent to quintuplet quarter notes in the new tempo, changing the metronome speed from 112 to 89.6.\(^{58}\) However, amidst this apparent change of speed the instruments both change note values, effectively continuing to play at the same speed.

Leading into the modulation, the right hand of the piano plays the quarter note pulse that has thus far defined the character of the piano throughout the movement. During the change from 4/4 to 5/4 the pulse does not change. In fact, the change of meter should have no effect on performance because downbeats are not accented throughout the movement. During the modulation, this pulse becomes a series of quintuplet quarter notes, maintaining the same speed and character as before. The left hand plays a similar non-change rhythmically speaking. During the 5/4 measures the left hand plays on downbeats and the eighth-note division between beats 3 and 4, dividing each measure in half. After the modulation the left hand plays on beats 1 and 3 of each measure in 4/4, continuing to divide the measures in half. Thus, despite the change of notated rhythm, the left hand maintains the same speed by continuing to play two equally spaced pulses per measure while the duration of measures in time remains constant. The cello does the same thing as the left hand of the piano. During the 5/4 measures the cello plays a rhythm that in conjunction with the piano’s left hand divides the measure into 4 equal parts, each worth a quarter note plus a sixteenth note, and it begins new notes on the second and

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\(^{58}\) This is a rare case in the sonata where the metronome speed does not equal a whole number, which seemed to be the goal of all of his calculations. Why he chose this speed when his calculations provided him with possible modulations to whole numbers remains unclear.
fourth of these divisions in each measure (the piano left hand notes strike on the first and third of these divisions). Again, this pattern continues mostly unchanged after the modulation. The cello skips its first beat, but then begins notes on the fourth beat of measure 35 followed by the second and fourth beats of measure 36.\(^\text{59}\)

Throughout the entire unit in the new tempo, the only locations with a rhythm different from what could be notated in the original tempo in 4/4 are the two sets of eighth notes played by the cello at the start of measure 37 and connecting measures 38 and 39. These eighth notes hold a fascinating challenge for the listener. The scoreless listener will probably continue to hear the quintuplet quarter notes as the primary beat with the cello and now left hand of the piano playing slightly off the beat. The eighth-notes may challenge this perception, but are not strong enough to change our hearing of the beat from the quintuplets because contrasting rhythms are what we have come to expect from the cello.\(^\text{60}\)

From the perspective of the narrative between the two instruments this results in an inversion of the trend we had experienced over the previous units. Before, the narrative primarily involved the piano line becoming more similar to the cello line, during the metric modulation the cello takes on the characteristics of the piano. As I described looking at each line individually, the cello for the first time plays a steady rhythm of half notes all on the beat. Reading the score, in which there is no doubt concerning the 4/4 meter, the only remaining hints at the cello characteristics from the

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59 The combination of the left hand of the piano and the cello produce a competing pulse, however, much like with the chord in measure 6, the difference in timbre between the instruments which must be combined to create this pulse encourages listeners to continue hearing the right hand of the piano as the real pulse.

60 In many recordings the eighth notes are played somewhat unevenly, as if they are working against the beat.
beginning are the skipped note on beat 2 of measure 35 and the fact that it is playing on the weaker beats of the measure. If we do accept the 4/4 meter, then the eighth notes become a place where the cello may assert its previous identity within the confines of the strict rhythmic pattern of the piano (two sets of eighth notes each filling the half-note beat). In either of these hearings/readings the metric modulation enables the cello to take on characteristics from the piano style. I view this moment as a paradox for the listener/score reader. Throughout the movement leading up to this moment Carter prepares the listener not to hear the metric modulation, whereas I believe the narrative of breaking down the boundaries between the styles of Schoenberg and Stravinsky is more effective if we do hear it.

**Unit 6 (Measures 43-48)**

In unit 5 the instruments come together and create a steady pulse between the cello and left hand of the piano. Harmonically, the instruments mix consonance and dissonance, while using all sharps avoiding enharmonic dissonances. Unit 6, which follows this convergence, returns to a level of dissonance reminiscent of the opening, with both instruments taking their characters from the opening to greater extremes. Starting in measure 44 both hands of the piano play staccato quarter notes together in octaves until measure 49. This marks the first time that the piano hands combine to create a consistent texture for any extended period of time since unit 1. The cello, on the other hand, becomes more unpredictable (figure 1.14). While previously the cello was rhythmically consistent throughout units, changing notes on eighth-note subdivisions or triplets, here it moves through all of these rapidly. In measures 43 and 44 the changes are on triplets, in measure 45 eighth notes, and measure 46 sixteenth notes. The cello adds
yet another dimension through the inclusion of double stops, enabling the instrument to become vertically dissonant with itself as seen with the simultaneous D and E in measure 45 and G and G-sharp in measure 46. Furthermore, the cello continues its rapid variation of dynamics, a crescendo in measure 43, decrescendo in measure 45, followed by piu forte and another crescendo respectively in the beginning and end of measure 46.

Figure 1.14: Cello Sonata, Cello measures 43-46

Figure 1.15: Cello Sonata, Measures 51-52, with semitone relationships between hands of the piano

Unit 7 (Measures 49-54)

After unit 6 returned the instruments to variations of their original identities, unit 7 condenses the progression of changes in the right hand from units 2 through 4, as it again takes on characteristics from the cello line. At the start of measure 49 the right hand adds a long slur while playing a half note, similar to the slurred whole notes in unit two.
In the second half of measure 49 the right hand changes to dotted quarter notes resulting in off-beats similar to unit 3. In measure 51 the rhythm changes again, incorporating sixteenth note subdivisions, aligning with the cello rhythmically and harmonically. Their first two harmonies of the measure are both major triads, C followed by A. They then continue to play complementary harmonies while the left hand plays semitone related dissonances with the right hand of the piano. In figure 1.15, lines show the semitone relationships between each pitch of the left hand and simultaneous pitches of the right.

**Figure 1.16: Cello Sonata, Measure 59**

![Musical notation image](image.png)

**Transition to the B Section (Measures 55 – 67)**

In measure 55, the cello reverts to a single line texture while the right hand continues playing chords using a simpler rhythmic pattern. Over the next five measures the cello begins to anticipate the virtuosic solos of the B section. This is accomplished through an even greater rate of change in character. There are chords in measure 56, triplets in 57, a return to eighth-notes in 58, and finally triplets, sixteenth-notes, and quintuplets all in measure 59 creating a rhythmic acceleration to accompany a crescendo. Triplet quarter notes played by the right hand of the piano in measure 59 support an illusion of acceleration by creating a competing steady pulse reminiscent of the metric modulation in section 5 (figure 1.16). The cello completes this section reminiscent of the
end of the first long phrase (mm. 17-21) with another ascending stepwise line of held pitches. Instead of emulating the three pitches as the right hand of the piano did in measures 19-21, in measures 60-67 the right hand copies the entire character of the previous cello line. This includes varied rhythms and rising lines with crescendi and accents throughout.

**The B Section**

The B section of the movement continues to contrast the two instruments, but does so in a new manner. Rather than juxtapose two contrasting characters through simultaneous playing, in the B section each instrument plays solo passages before they come together at the end, much like they had in the A section. The cello, which plays the first solo, begins with a free-flowing melodic line similar in character to what it had throughout the A section, although much faster and more expansive. After a brief interjection by the piano, mm. 73-4, the cello begins playing a constant stream of sixteenth notes, which continues to accompany the piano’s solo beginning in measure 78, serving as a variation on the piano’s quarter note pulse in the A section. The piano reduces in texture to a single melodic line, both espressivo and “flowing,” taking on the entire character of the opening cello line while the cello continues to play arpeggiated sixteenth notes. As such, the two instruments switch their characters almost entirely between measures 78 and 84. In measure 87 the piano takes over the stream of sixteenth notes and in measures 95-7 both instruments play them together, including both hands of the piano. In the end of the A section, the two instruments played variations of the free flowing cello line, and in the B section they both play a variation of the strict piano part.
The Return of the A Section (Measure 105)

The return of the A section at the end of the movement functions in a similar manner to sections 6 and 7, condensing even further the progression from dissonance to similarity. The beginning of the return of the A section has each instrument’s line deconstructed to its basic parts. The piano quarter notes are limited to only the left hand, while the right hand rests, and the cello plays the same pitch sequence from the opening. The second section of the return, beginning in measure 112, copies many of the changes in the original section two. The cello plays triplet divisions, and the piano appears to begin a melody of longer notes again, which becomes only a single note held for 4 measures. The A section return is cut off in measure 116, when the quarter notes of the piano stop and by measure 119 both hands of the piano together with the cello play on every 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} beat. Ultimately, the instruments end together in a series of chords, and finally with the minor 3\textsuperscript{rd} E and G natural in the cello and right hand of the piano. The consonance of the ending pitches, however, is challenged by the articulation, with both staccato and legato markings over the cello quarter note and the piano quarter tied to an additional eighth note. This articulation allows the cello note to be held, but it should end clearly before the piano does, perhaps suggesting that the characters of the two instruments have switched.

A complete switch of their parts does not appear until the end of the whole sonata. The last movement ends similarly to the B section of movement 1, with a fast moving cello line over minimal piano accompaniment. Then, in measure 174, a brief coda features a reprise of the material from the opening. This time, however, the cello plays steady pizzicato quarter notes over the slow moving melody in the piano. The piano
melody uses the same pitch content as the cello in section 1, suggesting that the instruments have fully changed their positions. In his discussions of this return to the opening at the end Carter has pointed to the circularity of *Finnegan’s Wake*. However, the sonata does not circle back to the beginning, but rather ends with an inversion of the beginning leading to a cadence that suggests a closure not present in Joyce’s mid-sentence ending. I see Carter’s analogy of *Finnegan’s Wake* as an attempt to inform our re-hearings of the work. Upon re-listening, our knowledge of the ending in which the instruments take on opposing characters challenges us to search for the common ground developed between them throughout the first movement as I demonstrated in my analysis. When then viewed through the concurrent debates over the direction of composition and the schools of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, Carter manages to communicate his admiration for the unique styles of the two composers, while encouraging listeners to search for their similarities even if they are hidden under the surface.

**Mediation through Jazz**

As I argued in my analysis, the first movement of the sonata centers on a basic opposition between the two instruments that is negotiated through the development of their parts. The return of this music at the end of the sonata with the instruments switched results in a cathartic moment in the exploration of music as a means of overcoming difference. In exploring the two contrasting playing styles, Carter suggests how Schoenberg and Stravinsky both managed to write innovative and expressive music, highlighting ideas of artistic freedom that became so important in cultural debates. In the cello line, the rhythmic freedom is apparent from the beginning, with its avoidance of beats and patterns. For the piano, Carter alters a variety of parameters including accent
patterns, pitch, and texture within the steady piano rhythm to create a sense of freedom and unpredictability matching the irregularity of the cello line.

Much later in his career Carter pointed to jazz in the 1940s as an important influence: “At the time I was a real jazz fan. There were night clubs on West 52nd Street where Art Tatum and other pianists that I liked a lot used to play. All those impressions flowed back into the First Symphony, the Holiday Overture and still later, the Cello Sonata and the Piano Sonata.” While Tatum was the only name Carter mentioned, positioning himself on 52nd street in the 1940s suggests that Carter was present through the development of bebop, and could have heard many of its leading performers such as Thelonious Monk, who wrote the now standard “52nd Street Theme.” The connection between jazz and the Cello Sonata continues after Restagno asks the next question intended to follow up on the Holiday Overture, and Carter responds with his statement connecting the sonata to Stravinsky and Schoenberg with which I began the chapter: “At that time I was attracted by the idea of combining certain elements of Schoenberg’s music with elements of Stravinsky: the irregularity of expression used by the former and the rhythmic base of the latter. That was what I tried to do in those pieces, developing an idea that had its source in jazz. But I think it was most successful in my Cello Sonata.”

Thus, when looking back, Carter credited his conception of juxtaposing and then uniting the styles to ideas he heard in jazz at the time.

Earlier in his career Carter avoided explicit statements, connecting compositional ideas to jazz, perhaps fearing an association of his music with nationalism many

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61 Restagno, 37.

62 Ibid., 38.
foreigners associated with American composers’ adoption of jazz tropes. Carter acknowledged and tried to resist the associations of jazz with American nationalism in his 1955 article “The Rhythmic Basis of American Music:”

It would be convenient if one could say – as so many have done – that the distinguishing mark of serious American music is its employment (or reworking) of the rhythms of our native folk or popular music, particularly jazz. In earlier years when American music was just beginning to take shape, such an attempt may have been useful; but now that a substantial number of works has accumulated, neither critics nor composers feel it any longer necessary to emphasize national characteristics.\(^63\)

He continues to describe the influence jazz had on European composers earlier in the century, and argues that for many Americans jazz has lost its excitement due to its ubiquity. In his discussion of American composers’ debt to jazz, Carter emphasizes a variety of rhythmic innovations by Harris, Copland, Sessions, and Ives. In Ives’ case, Carter sees only an abstract association based on both ignoring rather than consciously challenging regular rhythmic patterns. This distinguishes the American composers from Europeans such as Stravinsky and Bartók who worked within the European rhythmic tradition:

Although this appeared after a number of outstanding works by Stravinsky and Bartók had revealed the possibilities of irregular groupings of small units – which is what Harris is talking about – there is no doubt that he had a point in mind which becomes clear in the context of his own music and of jazz practice. For in spite of their irregular rhythmic patterns, written with constantly changing meters, Stravinsky and Bartók do often treat their irregular accents as displacements of regular ones by marking them with the same kind of vigor that was reserved in older music for syncopations. The quality of these accents is quite different from those used in jazz and in much new American music.\(^64\)

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\(^64\) Ibid.
In the Cello Sonata, I believe that Carter’s creation of accents in the steady rhythm through texture (a result of counterpoint) instead of accent markings reflects this change, avoiding a sense of displacement.

Through these writings, jazz becomes a source of abstract concepts to be used in the compositional process. However, I believe that Carter, a jazz fan at the time, probably encountered performances much more closely related to the Cello Sonata concept than has thus far been discussed. One exemplary work along these lines is the recording of “Epistrophy” by Thelonious Monk and Milt Jackson in 1948. In their introduction, Monk plays a steady pulse on the piano, while Jackson plays a rhythmically irregular melodic line on the vibraphone. The juxtaposition of a smooth fairly unpredictable melodic line played by an instrument that sustains pitches very well with a percussive piano produces numerous parallels with the sound world of the Cello Sonata, and I believe that hearing sounds like these may have provided some inspiration for Carter’s initial methods of juxtaposing the cello and piano. However, despite these surface similarities, on a conceptual level “Epistrophy” differs fundamentally from Carter’s work because once the main section of “Epistrophy” begins, the two instruments revert to a more complimentary relationship. For the remainder of the piece it is as if the introduction had never happened, whereas for Carter this relationship forms the premise for the entire movement. In fact, when Monk performed the work in 1966, he played an entirely new and much more straightforward introduction. Thus, this introduction has no fixed relationship to the identity of the piece “Epistrophy,” whereas the contrasting

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65 Thelonious Monk, *The Genius of Modern Music: Volume 1*, Blue Note LP 5002. In later releases “Epistrophy” was moved to the Milt Jackson compilations, *Wizard of the Vibes*.

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relationship of the Cello Sonata forms the premise around which the whole work is based.

Carter’s use of sounds he heard in jazz as a means of merging the styles of Schoenberg and Stravinsky in the Cello Sonata adds yet another dimension to the complex relationship of the work to the development of early Cold War cultural diplomacy. For many, jazz served as a means for American composers to signify American nationalism and appeal to larger domestic audiences. Post-war composers, however, were forced to reconcile this means of appealing to American audiences with the frequent warnings against musical nationalism from Bukofzer, List, and others. Even with America’s growing stature in the concert music world, the primary stages remained in Europe and American conductors hesitated to program new works, which often lost money. As such, Carter’s use of jazz on an abstract conceptual level appeases both sides of the debate. He includes a distinctly American element for export, but he does not do so explicitly. European audiences, unfamiliar with the development of bebop in New York, would have no reason to draw a connection between the sonata and jazz. However, by claiming jazz as an underpinning for a new highly complex approach to modernist composition, Carter possibly saw himself as raising the stature of the American popular idiom from an intellectual standpoint. An examination of the Cello Sonata reveals Carter’s ability to mediate the continuing debate between leading pre-war modernist styles, while simultaneously proposing a new form of post-war modernism that both

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66 Annegret Fauser has argued with regard to Aaron Copland that Nadia Boulanger taught her students to “separate the musical elements of jazz from its racial and historical origins in order to create an abstract component of national identity formation.” While this dealt primarily with the use of swing rhythms in neo-classical works, we can view Carter’s extraction of this new relationship appropriate for relating newer jazz (bebop) with his new form of modernism. See Annegret Fauser, “Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, and the Making of an ‘American’ Composer” *The Musical Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (Winter, 2006): 526.
celebrates traditional European musics and merges them intellectually with American jazz. As the product of a musical diplomat, Carter’s Sonata unites elements that can appeal to diverse sets of audiences while simultaneously creating something entirely new.
Chapter 2: Writing with “Twelve Tones”

Histories of postwar American composition, such as those by Griffiths, Straus, and Broyles, commonly group Elliott Carter with twelve-tone and/or serial composers, whether claiming he used these methods or not.¹ For others, Carter’s avoidance of such techniques became a fundamental aspect of his identity.² Charles Rosen claims “Carter is perhaps the only major composer of our time who has never even tried to write a serial work,” and Steven Mackey writes: “Elliott Carter, in fact, has always been provocatively anti-Serial.”³ Such contradicting beliefs over his position with regard to postwar compositional trends result from Carter’s own evolving construction and presentation of

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¹ In general history textbooks Carter’s position varies. Mark Evan Bonds writes “His early music tends toward the Neoclassical, but he later embraced serial composition. His music tends to be highly polyphonic and metrically complex” (Mark Evan Bonds, A History of Music in Western Culture, 2nd ed. [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006]: 657). Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca list Carter under the heading “New Virtuosity,” a term developed in the 1960s by Eric Salzman that Carter adopted in describing himself. Among histories of twentieth-century music, Robert Morgan positions Carter in a chapter about innovations in form and texture, alongside Penderecki, Xenakis, and Shapey; Griffiths places him in a chapter on America’s Classic Modernism, between Schoenberg and Babbitt; and Kyle Gann positions Carter alongside Roger Sessions as a composer who began with tonality before moving to atonality, but specifies that unlike Sessions, Carter never adopted twelve-tone writing.

² Many scholars, in addition to composers themselves, do not accurately define and distinguish serial techniques from twelve-tone techniques. As we will see, often Carter and other scholars have pointed to qualities such as twelve-tone aggregates as symbolic or representative of twelve-tone composition. However, twelve-tone composition is dependent upon order of pitches and not merely content (Carter has tried to argue otherwise in his claims that he leaves notes out of the twelve-tone chords, but because they are ordered I believe they should fall within the purview of twelve-tone composition). Serialism is equally problematic due to the number of parameters that may be controlled through serial procedures while others are not. In this chapter I use serial in a broad sense to describe ordered events which are manipulated based on that order. In this context, I do not consider Carter’s tempo modulations, which were often sketched through various calculations in the margins of his sketches to be a serial process because he does not seem concerned with the ordering of tempi.

an artistic persona throughout his career, especially in relation to twelve-tone and serial methods.⁴

For many modern listeners there is no perceptible distinction between a piece composed with twelve-tone and/or serial methods and those composed through other atonal methods. Anne Shreffler argues that for audiences the two styles should not be distinguished: “most atonal music written after ca. 1950 is indebted to serial principles and techniques… to the general or even specialized listening public, the distinction between ordered and unordered sets, or between sets with twelve members or those with only six, is not likely to be perceptible or relevant.”⁵ However, even if such distinctions may not be perceptible, twelve-tone and serial methods found importance beyond their use as compositional and analytic tools, serving as cultural markers, signifying a merging of art and science.⁶ Such a merger had important ramifications in a Cold War environment, in which music served as a propaganda tool. ‘Advanced’ music by Western composers served as a direct means of countering Soviet propaganda that positioned America as a nation of barbarians. For Carter, the inability of listeners to perceive a difference between his compositions and twelve-tone or serial compositions allowed him to draw on these politically evocative tropes. At the same time, Carter’s general avoidance of these methods allowed him to present himself as an alternative to American

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⁴ The confusion may also stem in part from the inability of most, if not all, listeners to differentiate twelve-tone compositions from atonal compositions.


concert audiences, who often disliked the pieces that resulted from serial methods. In this chapter I will show how Carter took advantage of the ambiguous sound of his atonal compositions to constantly redefine his relationship with serialism as he spoke to different audiences.

**Scholarship and Carter’s “Serialism”**

Scholarly works dealing specifically with Carter, as opposed to more general histories, often evade his complex relationship with serial and twelve-tone composition by positioning him as an individualist composer, avoiding associations with any particular group or school. Taking a cue from Carter himself, they portray him as an inheritor of the modernist tradition from the first half of the twentieth century, but rarely mention his contemporaries. The first edition of David Schiff’s *The Music of Elliott Carter* exemplifies this approach to discussions of Carter and his music. Schiff contextualizes Carter’s early compositions, but after the First Quartet, he turns his primary attention to brief theoretical analyses of each work. Furthermore, Schiff analyzes Carter’s compositions using methods derived from Carter’s discussions of his own pieces instead of the terminology adopted by many other composers and theorists. In the substantial revisions for the second edition of the book, Schiff changed the organization from chronological to genre and piece-based, placing the works within worlds of their own, independent from their time and place.\(^7\)

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\(^8\) David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). Schiff added an introductory chapter to the second edition where he discussed aspects of Carter’s early life that was otherwise lost through the change of structure. He explains that the changes were intended to avoid redundancy and also to appeal to his primary audience of “performers, listeners, composers, and critics” who he presumably expects will use the book as a reference work learning about specific pieces as they encounter them (he contrasts this audience with the audience of music theory graduate students, who had been critical of the work). The book is particularly problematic for Carter scholars because having been
In his 2011 biography of Carter, James Wierzbicki criticizes Schiff for the revisions to his book that decontextualize Carter’s compositions, but Wierzbicki also avoids discussions of Carter’s position with regard to his postwar contemporaries.\textsuperscript{9} Wierzbicki focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of Carter’s thought and conceptions of time, highlighting Carter’s studies at Harvard, and arguing that ideas he first encountered as an undergraduate formed the premise for Carter’s later conceptions of musical time and space. These discussions, however, ignore the postwar compositional environment, in which time and space arguably had new meaning for numerous artists questioning the function of music in a changed world.\textsuperscript{10} Contemporary American composers, such as Milton Babbitt, a leader of the American serial movement, make no appearance in the book or do so only in passing, with no mention of possible influences or relationships.\textsuperscript{11} Most histories view the end of the Second World War as a breaking point in which composers sought something new; even Carter has compared neoclassicism after the war to a “masquerade in a bomb-shelter.”\textsuperscript{12} Why then, have

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9}James Wierzbicki, \textit{Elliott Carter} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011).
  \item \textsuperscript{10}A wide range of scholarship deals with the wide ranging implications of the atomic bomb. See, for example, Andrew J. Rotter, \textit{Hiroshima: The World’s Bomb} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
  \item \textsuperscript{11}Wierzbicki, 98. The Carter collection does not include a great deal of correspondence between Carter and Babbitt, but the notes there suggest that they spoke in person regularly and were friendly and candid with each other. Peter Westergaard, a composer familiar with both told me that he believed they were close friends and confidants. Babbitt appears in a discussion of Richard Taruskin’s criticisms of Carter as another composer criticized for writing “absurdly overcomposed monstrosities.” While Taruskin’s treatment of Carter has been criticized by both Wierzbicki and Rosen, by devoting an entire chapter to Carter in the way he does, Taruskin avoids the pitfalls of trying to place Carter within any school or community. I will discuss his treatment of Carter’s relationship with Nabokov and the United States government (the root of his arguments with Rosen) in Chapter Three.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Allen Edwards, \textit{Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: A Conversation with Elliott Carter} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 60. The statement appears in the book as Edwards quoting Carter in a lecture,
\end{itemize}
scholars examining Carter’s musical developments focused on his early education in assessing his later philosophy and style.\(^{13}\)

The idea of Carter as the lone or solitary figure does not hold up when scrutinized in light of his numerous friendships and his wide variety of professional activities throughout his career. To examine his position within the development of the American twelve-tone or serial community, I rely on Anthony Cohen’s theorizing of community boundaries.\(^{14}\) Cohen argues that communities should not be defined by the requirements for inclusion, but rather by the means of exclusivity which define the boundary. For a strict serial composer, such as the young Boulez in his rejection of Schoenberg, these boundaries could be drawn so tightly that Carter would never approach inclusion. As Carter became a well-known and public composer, he was granted the ability to construct boundaries himself in interviews and public lectures, occasionally choosing to include himself as a twelve-tone composer. In the 1980s and 90s, when Carter sought to reject serialism despite adopting some of its methods such as twelve-tone all-interval chords, he restricted his vision of these methods making the pedantic claim that because he omitted tones in the final composition he could not be a twelve-tone composer.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Meyer and Shreffler similarly, while explicitly examining documents from throughout his life, overlook his relationships with contemporary American composers. They do discuss some contemporary European composers, such as Petrassi, and Carter’s relationship with Nancarrow, living in Mexico. They title the chapter dealing with the 1960s “A Very Isolating Effort,” perhaps referring to the development of specialized academic approaches to discussing contemporary composition, which arguably Carter did not do. Carter was able to avoid these discussions because he was sufficiently wealthy that he did not need to maintain a full-time academic teaching position (I will discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter).


\(^{15}\) I believe that in these claims Carter inadvertently gets to one of the fundamental challenges of defining serial composition: is serialism defined by pre-compositional methods or the resultant piece? If serialism should be defined in the pre-compositional stage then Carter’s all-interval twelve-tone chords certainly
composers construct histories of serialism and twelve-tone composition in America they have repeatedly redefined the boundaries of this community to fit their own historiographical purposes.

Nadine Hubbs in *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound* traces communities of homosexual composers in America. She argues that the growth of serialism in the mid 1950s, was a response to the “eruption and then bursting of a queer ‘flavor,’ in the American arts” during the Second World War: “The Cold War co-construction of homosexuals and communists as infiltrators and subversives lent further force and sanction to the purging of lesbians and gays from government, culture, and other domains. In American art music, postwar renormalization manifested itself in composition’s elitist and masculinist turn toward serialist and quasi-scientific methods.”

Carter appears in Hubbs’ study in a list of American heterosexual serial composers contemporary with Ben Weber: “Among American dodecaphonists of his generation, which included Perle, Babbitt, and Carter, Weber was indeed the only homosexual.”

For Hubbs, an unambiguously serial postwar Carter serves as an example of the possibilities available to the heterosexual composer, distinct from those who viewed themselves as trapped inside the tonal/homosexual compositional community she qualify, and I would argue that many of his earlier works should be read as serial as well. However, if serialism is predicated on the final work – being able to hear and/or identify the procedures used, then the same pieces, in which the material is manipulated more freely, may not be serial at all.


17 Ibid., 128. This sentence, while not in quotations, is credited to Joseph R. Dalton’s liner notes for the album *Gay American Composers*, vol. 2 CRI CD 750. Carter also appears in a footnote regarding Ned Rorem’s recollection of a Parisian radio appearance in the late 1990s, when Carter (representing the serialist viewpoint) stated that in 1951 the musical world started in France and Rorem disagreed stating that this was when it stopped. Carter’s statement probably reflects his desire to appeal to a French audience by promoting French composition and his close friendship with Pierre Boulez.
constructs. Carter exemplified the manner in which heterosexual composers could transition from the war-time ‘queer flavor’ to postwar scientism. After beginning his career as a tonal composer, studying under Boulanger and befriending Copland, Carter became one of the first composers to adopt a new atonal language after the war. Furthermore, whether or not Carter actually was a serial composer, he was embraced by leading members of the serial community in a manner that Hubbs argues Copland was not: “Copland’s forays into twelve-tone composition, however were embraced neither by his established listeners nor by the adherents of serial music.”

The conception of an individualist Carter writing non-serial atonal music put forth by David Schiff could have easily found a place in Michael Broyles study of American composers as “mavericks.” Broyles argues that mavericks define the American compositional experience until the Second World War. After the war, Broyles perceives a conscious attempt by multiple composers to claim the maverick tradition for themselves, and he uses this as a frame for reexamining the academic debates over the existence of a serial tyranny. While this reframing of the debate seems promising initially, it ultimately serves as a backdrop for Broyles to champion anti-serialists, particularly Cage and Partch. Broyles, representing those who believe in the existence of a serial tyranny, claims that

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18 Ibid., 166. Copland’s supposed rejection by serial composers is debatable. See, for example, Edward T. Cone, “Conversation with Aaron Copland,” Perspectives of New Music 6, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1968): 57-72.

19 Michael Broyles, Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 160-61. The idea of American composers as mavericks has also been championed in a radio series by American Public Media, which includes an interview with Carter. In Kyle Gann’s essay for the series he explains that the American maverick composer is not necessarily undisciplined and may even be trained in institutions such as Juilliard or Berkeley, but they are “independent, dissenters, nonconformists” (Kyle Gann, “What Is a Maverick” American Public Media, http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/essay_gann01.html).
even if serial composers did not actually dominate the academies many students felt forced to adopt these methods:

Yet regardless of the extent to which tonal composers controlled the machinery, the serialists managed to cast an immense shadow over the postwar American musical world. Earlier we saw recent examples of conflicting opinions about serialism, as gathered by K. Robert Shwarz. The witness list of composers who felt the negative effects of serialism’s predominance is much longer, and now is time to call them to the stand.\textsuperscript{20}

Broyles positions complexity as a defining feature of the serial aesthetic, which he attributes to Leonard Meyer, whom Broyles describes as serialism’s philosophical spokesman despite never writing specifically about serialism.\textsuperscript{21} Broyles describes Meyer and by extension serial composers as valuing musical efficiency and complexity.\textsuperscript{22} He sees these characteristics leading to a conception of musical logic, and argues that Carter exemplified the values of postwar serial composers (here defined as Babbitt and Meyer, who had little connection to serial music) in his review of Ives’ *Concord Sonata*:

Many value judgments of the second half of the twentieth century have been predicated on the premise of a musical logic, sometimes as if that logic had been established a priori. Elliott Carter has become infamous in Ives circles for his report of Ives ‘jacking up the dissonance,’ that is, adding extra dissonance to his manuscripts many years after they were

\textsuperscript{20} Broyles, 169. Broyles follows this with a long list of statements by composers and musicologists who studied composition, regarding their impression of serialism at the time. By taking quotations from reminiscences, Broyles does a disservice to studies of the actual position of serialism at the time. As we will see studying Carter, who has made statements that could easily fit into this section recently, his problem with serialism stemmed not from the composers, many of whom were close friends, but the influence and impact of analysts who embraced serialism’s guidance in trying to understand structures in atonal music.

\textsuperscript{21} Wierzbicki points out that in the 1950s Carter and Meyer were concerned with some of the same issues and suggests that Carter probably would have approved of Meyer’s quotations from Norbert Wiener, but that he would not have had much use for Meyer’s conclusion’s that “musical greatness is ultimately metaphysical” (Wierzbi\’cki, 73).

\textsuperscript{22} I do not find Broyles’s arguments in this regard particularly convincing because Meyer was focused primarily on ideas of cognition, based on our expectations of musical events and culturally informed emotional responses. Babbitt did not seem so concerned with the field of cognition and these listener responses, expecting listeners to challenge their ears and capabilities.
originally composed. That may well have occurred, but it seems that Carter and Ives occupied two entirely different regions on the American musical landscape. Carter underscored his comments about the premiere of Ives’s *Concord Sonata*: “In form and aesthetic it is basically conventional, not unlike the Liszt Sonata, full of paraphernalia of the overdressy sonata school… Behind all this confused texture there is a lack of logic which repeated hearings can never clarify… the esthetic is naïve, often too naïve to express serious thoughts, frequently depending on quotation of well-known American tunes, with little comment, possibly charming, but certainly trivial.”

Broyles proceeds to explain that Carter’s statements about the sonata lacking musical logic are emblematic of postwar academic composers:

In his brief statement Carter capsulates much of the rhetoric and beliefs of post-World War II academics: an emphasis on logic and accepted principles of structure, dismissal of that which doesn’t conform as naïve and trivial, and a disdain for the vernacular… Babbitt, Carter, Sessions, equally believed in a music founded on the twentieth-century deity, science, and its home, the temple of academia.23

The positioning of Carter’s review as representative of the postwar academic/scientific community is problematic for many reasons. First, the review, dated 1939, originates from a period in Carter’s career when he was writing tonal music. This review may fit into another trend Broyles describes as a part of the history of American mavericks, positioning European “sophistication” against American “naïveté.”24 In this light, Carter’s review should be read from the position of American tonalists, a group that would later feel persecuted by serialism. Broyles conflates a musical logic from Carter’s extensive training in traditional counterpoint and scientific logic later associated with serial methods. In fact, there is little evidence that Carter sought to connect his postwar compositions with either science or the academy. He rejected teaching positions, and

23 Broyles, 282-3.

24 Ibid.
dismissed analyses of his music based on the identification of pitch-class sets as not useful in understanding his compositions.\textsuperscript{25} As we will see, in his lectures on Nono’s \textit{Il Canto Sospeso}, Carter believed that the beauty of the work lay not in its method, but in its ability to communicate and express a message, which he believed was only possible through the composer’s artistic decisions about how to transform the results of serial processes into a final composition.\textsuperscript{26}

For Hubbs and Broyles, the boundary of the serial community is constructed from the outside. For composers writing tonal music, Carter’s dense and complex web of atonality sounded most similar to the complex atonal compositions produced by serial composers. Furthermore, to exclude him from all of the communities discussed would position Carter as the displaced minority or maverick treading against the larger arguments of each author. Joseph Straus, in his study of American twelve-tone composition, constructs an equally broad community of twelve-tone composers from the opposite perspective, seeking to demonstrate the inclusiveness of the community. Straus’ emphasis on brief analyses to demonstrate how composers approached twelve-tone composition in various ways makes Carter a particularly problematic case. We see this in a comparison of Straus’ treatment of Carter in the sections of his book with more general

\textsuperscript{25} Carter’s letter to Susan Sommer about Mead’s review of the Schiff book exemplifies his rejection of the scientific mindset that sought to create a common vocabulary for musical phenomenon. Carter’s insistence that his compositions be analyzed in his own terms can be seen as an anti-scientific approach to analysis. I will discuss this letter in greater detail at the end of the chapter.

\textsuperscript{26} Carter appears earlier in Broyles’ book as well as a free atonalist: “But gradually, other choices emerged, as established composers like Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions evolved a free atonality, and as serialism was less rigidly applied” (Broyles, 173). It is unclear what this is supposed to mean. Carter arguably fits most easily into the category of free atonalist beginning in the late 1940s, before anyone would consider a serial school existing. However, the implication of the statement is that Carter adopted free atonality later when both he and serialism were well established. I would argue, however, that his development after the First Quartet became more formal and structured, and began to more closely resemble serialism. Elsewhere in the book Broyles equates serialism and free atonality because audiences could not hear a difference.
discussions, where Carter is one of many serial composers, and the short chapter
dedicated to Carter, in which Straus admits that Carter “has never identified himself as a
twelve-tone composer.”

In the introduction to his chapter on “Postwar Pioneers” Straus described Carter
as one of the leading composers working out a distinct approach to twelve-tone
composition.  

During the war, a rising generation of twelve-tone composers (including
Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, and George Perle) was already at work,
foraging new ways of composing with twelve-tones related only to each
other and setting the agenda for subsequent work. Only slightly later, they
were joined by more prominent, older composers (including Aaron
Copland and Roger Sessions), who modified well-established musical
styles to take account of these new developments.  

In this section Straus never clarifies why we should consider Carter’s postwar
compositions as the result of composing with twelve-tones related only to each other. The
phrase “twelve-tones related only to each other,” normally refers specifically to twelve-
tone methods based on ordering, but Straus’s decision not to clarify the meaning of this
statement may reflect the problematic inclusion of Carter in this group.

Straus presents a more specific account of Carter’s relationship to twelve-tone
composition in the small chapter dedicated to the composer. Straus begins by clarifying
decision to include Carter: “Although Elliott Carter has never identified himself as a
twelve-tone composer, his compositional concerns intersect with twelve-tone

27 Joseph N. Straus, 

28 Straus’ chapter title “Postwar Pioneers” draws on the same ideas of the free spirited American composer as Broyles’ mavericks. This has become a standard mode of American biography, and applies to accounts of Carter’s life and career as I will discuss in Chapter Three, focusing on the narrative surrounding Carter’s composition of his First Quartet.

29 Straus, 

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composition enough to justify his inclusion in this book.”30 As far as what such concerns may allow for the non-twelve-tone composer to be one in his book, Straus points to Carter’s interest in the completion of twelve-tone aggregates defined through pitch content and not order: “His apparent compositional goal of combinatorial completion within the twelve pc universe allies him closely with the twelve-tone serial enterprise. In this broad sense, Carter has been a twelve-tone composer since the early 1950s.”31 Straus never explains why he believes Carter had a compositional goal of creating twelve-tone aggregates, or why the use of aggregates should be sufficient to declare Carter a twelve-tone composer. In fact there is little evidence that this was ever a concern, and Carter has claimed the opposite as evidence that he is not a twelve-tone composer. He wrote that even in the later pieces based on all-interval twelve-tone chords he omits pitches so he should not be considered a twelve-tone composer. Rather than chromatic completion, Carter seems most interested in the completion of interval and chord sets. This began in the Cello Sonata, based on an all-interval tetrachord, and continued throughout his later works as he expanded his vocabulary, for example using all pentachords and septachords in the Concerto for Orchestra. In these pieces, which begin with systematic explorations of chord collections, full chromatic aggregates are fairly common, but there is little evidence that these aggregates were ever a primary concern in Carter’s composition. The chord collections seem important primarily as a starting point in a long process of sketching ideas, which would go through numerous changes before being realized in the

30 Ibid., 52.

31 Ibid., 53.
final work (sketches for Carter’s compositions from this period regularly number in the thousands of pages).

Another means of avoiding the troublesome issues of Carter’s identification as a serial or twelve-tone composer used by Straus is to focus on the compositions from after 1980 that make use of all-interval twelve-tone chords, in which each vertical combination functions as a full row ordered by register. While arguing that Carter can be considered a twelve-tone composer in a broad sense since the 50s, his adoption of twelve-tone chords solidifies this identity since 1980, and Straus chooses to focus on one of these, much later pieces, for his analysis. Looking at figure 2.1, taken from Andrew Mead’s analysis of Night Fantasies, we see how Carter makes use of twelve-tone chords. He orders the row vertically by register and in the process of composing omits selected pitches (here Bb6), an omission which undermines the means by which Straus previously defined Carter as a twelve-tone-like composer (complete aggregates). This method allows Carter to emphasize certain subsets of the row by finding common tones between consecutive rows, and he chooses rows in which the common tones are naturally accented as the lowest and highest pitches registrally. Thus, he adopts these chords in ways that align closely with earlier twelve-tone methods, although we see in his writings that Carter misreads twelve-tone methods to demand a focus on aggregate completion to distinguish his use of these chords from twelve-tone methods: “What I do is, of course, very different from the Schoenberg methods… and I do not always use the entire 12 notes before I go

on to the next section!”

In studying Carter’s sketches for the work, John Link has shown that Carter simultaneously explored various properties of these chords as entire rows, while also looking at ways he could derive smaller subsets based on shared interval classes, informing his decisions regarding which pitches could be omitted to create a desired effect.

**Figure 2.1: Andrew Mead's analysis of Night Fantasies, measures 11-14**

In his article “Twelve-tone Composition and the Music of Elliott Carter” Andrew Mead follows a middle ground, pointing to interactions between Carter’s music and twelve-tone compositions. Mead argues that Carter and twelve-tone composers were all

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33 Letter from Elliott Carter to Felix Meyer, April 19, 1993, Paul Sacher Stiftung. I will discuss this letter in greater detail later in the chapter.

concerned with the definition, organization, and use of interval and chord collections in trying to formulate a language for non-tonal music. Despite his detailed study of Carter’s compositions and the close relationship to twelve-tone ideas, Mead takes great care to avoid stating that he considers Carter a twelve-tone composer. Instead, he apparently felt compelled to include a paragraph at the end of the article celebrating Carter’s originality:

Finally, we should emphasize that observations concerning the curious intersections between Carter’s music and the work of others should in no way diminish our sense of the composer’s originality. On the contrary, such intersections are unavoidable given the inevitable restrictions imposed by the inherent abstract structure of the twelve-pitch-class total chromatic, and our appreciation of those commonalities can only increase our enjoyment of the individualities of each composer’s music.  

Mead convincingly argues that methods of analyses derived from twelve-tone composition should inform analyses of Carter’s works, and Carter’s use of chords and intervals may inform analyses of serial works. However, his apparent need to conclude with a paragraph about Carter’s originality reflects Carter’s own attempts to construct a non-twelve-tone identity. In the remainder of this chapter I will trace the development of Carter’s relationship with twelve-tone and serial composition, arguing that he carefully constructed his public compositional persona in relation to developments he saw around him. In tracing this narrative we will see one angle of Carter’s construction of a complex and changing, yet specifically American persona, which will be supplemented with other angles taken in the following chapter.

**Twelve-Tone Sketches**

In his discussion with Enzo Restagno about the influence of Schoenbeerg, Carter confessed that while he bought and studied twelve-tone scores in the 1920s, he did not

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understand the system until two decades later, when Rene Leibowitz wrote his seminal book on the subject and gave lectures throughout the United States. Leibowitz’s promotion of twelve-tone composition in postwar America aligns with Carter’s first experiments with strict twelve-tone composition, surviving in two sketches. The first sketch appears on the back of a piano reduction of the *Holiday Overture* held by the Library of Congress. The second appears within the sketches for the Piano Sonata composed between 1945 and 1946. In the *Holiday Overture* sketch, Carter attempted to construct a row with tonal implications, but he made no effort to use the row in a composition. In the Piano Sonata sketch, labeled a “12-tone episode” we find his first attempts to compose a section of a larger work based on a row.

The date of the row written on the *Holiday Overture* reduction is unknown. The reduction probably originates from 1944, made immediately after composing the work so that Carter and Aaron Copland, who would champion it in a competition sponsored by Koussevitzky, could play through the work together. The row, which appears on the back of the reduction, may have been added at any later time, but based on the emphasis on tonal constructions it seems unlikely to date from much later than 1944. Alongside the

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37 I would like to thank Steven Soderberg of the Library of Congress for sharing this with me.

38 Carter spoke about a four-hand reduction of the work in his 1967 lectures in Minnesota stating: “Now let me say about this that my music is always written directly for the orchestra, a lot of it can’t be played on the piano, I remember when I wrote this piece back in 1944 I made a piano reduction of it and tried to play it with Aaron Copland for piano four hands and we made such a mess of it that I went home and decided that the whole piece was a mistake.” Carter rarely made piano reductions of his compositions, so I believe that this must be the same one. That year, 1944, also marked the premiere of Schoenberg’s *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* in New York, which derived tonal content from twelve-tone rows.
row, the page contains a variety of short chord progressions and notes regarding sounds Carter wants (see figure 2.2). The top of the page contains two chord progressions in four-part harmony with brief notes added by Carter such as “no resolution,” “no suspensions,” and “no aug int. leaps.” In the middle of the page he writes individual chords with notes about their character, such as “all 2\textsuperscript{nd} inv in minor are Dark somber brooding.” By the time we reach the row, on the bottom right, which Carter labels “row” and boxes off from the rest of the page, it seems clear that he is thinking in tonal terms about the characters and sounds he may derive. He divides the row into trichords, tetrachords, and hexachords through brackets above and below the row, many of which have tonal implications. The first trichord, C, A-flat and F creates an F-minor triad, the third, G-flat, E-flat, and A creates a diminished triad, and the last, D, B-flat, and G creates another minor triad. Below the row he writes two vertical chords derived from the row, the first a minor triad which begins the row, and the second a tetrachord extracted from the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth notes in the row. There is no evidence that Carter ever did anything further with this row in terms of composition. It seems that he was experimenting with chords and sounds and considered a twelve-tone row another way to do this. However, since he was still thinking in tonal terms the row’s construction emphasized some tonal qualities, while possibly trying to avoid others (see the notes above it such as “no dom 7th”).


\[\text{40 Both of the minor triads begin with the fifth, which Carter may have seen in connection to his earlier comment about second inversion minor chords being dark and brooding. In the last trichord this fifth is written as the lowest pitch, but not in the first, although it seems the primary concern with regard to octave was to keep everything on the staff.}\]
His emphasis on tonal characteristics of the row reflects his writing about twelve-tone methods at the time. Carter’s production as a writer and critic slowed towards the end of the war when he took on teaching jobs and a position with the Office of War Information. As such, his thoughts on the explosion of twelve-tone composition after the war are not well documented. He did speak about twelve-tone composition in his 1946 article about Walter Piston, celebrating the accomplishments of one of his teachers and friends. Carter first brings up twelve-tone methods in his discussion of Piston’s First Symphony: “elements of the twelve-tone technique are integrated into Piston’s style… The pizzicato bass contains nine of the twelve chromatic tones and the three others are supplied by the theme sung above it.” Later, Carter praises the Partita for Violin, Viola, and Organ as Mozarteon for Piston’s attempts to combine numerous elements, including twelve-tone rows, to create a contemporary language: “the third movement, ‘Variations,’ is built on a twelve-tone row (marked O in the example) and its inverted, retrograde, and

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retrograde-inverted (marked RI) variants. This material is treated tonally and is imbued with a tender and gentle individuality.\(^{42}\)

Carter first attempted to incorporate twelve-tone methods into a composition in an episode for his 1945-46 Piano Sonata (the complete sketch is in figure 2.3).\(^{43}\) The sketch begins with a straightforward statement of the row, with the first pitch, C-flat, played and held by the right hand while the left hand plays through the row in mostly eighth notes (figure 2.4). A rest in the middle divides the row into two all-combinatorial hexachords with the same interval content [023457]. After the only bar line in the sketch, Carter writes a retrograde of the original row. This time, the row switches hands in the middle, beginning with a held note in the right hand and the remainder of the first hexachord in the left, then switching to a held note in the left hand and the remainder of the second hexachord in the right. He also provides the first hints of not strictly following twelve-tone strictures by repeating the B-flat on either side of the E-flat (figure 2.5), the only place in the row that has a leap by a fourth or fifth.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 371.

\(^{43}\) Elliott Carter, Piano Sonata Sketches, Elliott Carter Collection, Library of Congress.
Throughout the remainder of the sketch Carter continues the process of breaking down the row into progressively smaller sections and alternating between the two hands. He begins with the inverted row form beginning with G natural, the note held over from
the previous row, but replaces the expected B-flat of the fourth position with a D-flat. The right hand entrance does not seem intended to complete this row, but perhaps begin the row form starting with A natural (the middle of figure 2.6), although slightly out of order. While the subsets get progressively smaller, the pitches become increasingly unfaithful to the ordering from the original row forms, breaking with one of the most important principles of twelve-tone composition. This parallels Christopher Kies’ observation regarding pitch collections in his analysis of the Cello Sonata: “Subsets are broken apart and combined with tones outside of the collection to create new contexts and alliances.”

Figure 2.6: 12-tone episode sketch, end of first line

![Image of musical notation]

The second line of the sketch begins with the two trichords from the second half of the original row form, the first trichord in a new order and the second maintaining the original order (see figure 2.7). Carter returns to a complete row form when the hands divide again in the middle of the line, with the inversion of the first hexachord played by the left hand and the second played in retrograde by the right (figure 2.8). In the remainder of the line, Carter breaks up this version of the row, having the right hand

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repeat its hexachord in retrograde with the G natural moved from the last to the third position. The line ends with the trichord E, D, G taken from the left hand’s hexachord, while the left hand plays the G-flat to F semitone from the hexachord of the right hand.

**Figure 2.7: 12-tone episode sketch, beginning of second line**

![Figure 2.7](image1)

**Figure 2.8: 12-tone episode sketch, return of complete row**

![Figure 2.8](image2)

In the third line of the sketch (figure 2.9), Carter continues his use of tetrachords derived from the row by combining the first tetrachord from the original row in the right hand with the second tetrachord of the inverted form beginning on G natural. However, he alters the order of pitches within the tetrachords. The use of two non-combinatorial hexachords in conjunction with his freedom in changing the order allows Carter to produce octaves between the voices, first simultaneously on C natural and then in
succession with C-flat. In the last measures, Carter writes for only the right hand, nearly abandoning the row forms he had been using throughout.

**Figure 2.9: 12-tone episode sketch, third line**

Carter never spoke specifically about why he experimented with twelve-tone composition at the time or why he stopped so quickly. From the sketch it seems that he had at least a basic understanding of row forms, inversions, retrogrades, and methods of dividing the row. However, he may have felt overly restricted, often changing pitch orders, which results in a form of free composition. Perhaps the octaves at the end of the Piano Sonata sketch left him at an impasse, uncertain how to properly proceed in a twelve-tone composition. The speed with which Carter abandoned attempts at strict twelve-tone composition is seen by his decision to rely only on references to the complete aggregate in creating a likeness of Schoenberg for the 1948 Cello Sonata as I described in the previous chapter.

**The 1950s: The Growth of the Twelve-Tone/Serial Fad**

When Carter experimented with twelve-tone composition in the mid-1940s he did not foresee the development of serialism as a significant trend in American music. Instead, Carter observed varying approaches to further developing tonal constructions. He also spoke about compositional trends in national terms, finding American composers
split between those writing music based on American popular materials and those writing in an international style, which began as a catchall for almost everything else. Over the next decade Carter took an active role in the evolution of this “international” style, as it transformed from viewing tonality as a space for expansion to searching for new means of ordering pitch in an atonal sound world, including dodecaphony. While Carter gave up on twelve-tone rows before their new rise to prominence, he championed the music of the Second Viennese School, probably assuming that others would follow his own path from the late 1940s, moving beyond twelve-tone writing to less restrictive forms of structuring atonal compositions. By the end of the 1950s, Carter thought that this had happened in America. He perceived the internationally oriented American composers as beginning to break away from Europe by moving beyond serialism, even if those composers did not view themselves in this light.

Carter first wrote about a split between “American” and international styles within American composition during the Second World War. In 1945 the Office of War Information asked Carter to prepare a presentation about trends in contemporary American music designed to appeal to French audiences. The presentation was never completed, but Carter’s initial outline remains. In the outline Carter contrasts the development of a specifically American style that adopts popular materials including “early American hymns, dance tunes, jazz, and various kinds of music of the people,” and an international style, presumably centered around neoclassicism, used by Sessions, Piston, and Barber. At this time, still during the war, Carter did not deem a discussion of twelve-tone and atonal composition necessary, especially for French audiences.

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45 Meyer and Shreffler, 67–70. Carter’s emphasis on neoclassical music may also reflect the prominence of these composers within the OWI.
Instead he promoted American tonal and neoclassical composers as representatives of the international style.

In 1950, Carter had two more opportunities to write about contemporary music for foreign audiences, exploring these ideas in greater depth. First, he was asked to contribute an article about contemporary music for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This article enabled Carter to speak relatively freely about 20th-century music. In the essay, Carter positions neo-classicism and atonality, including twelve-tone composition, as the dominant trends of the century, highlighting the rejection of these ideas by authoritarian governments: “When the Nazi and Soviet states in the 1930’s and 1940’s began to legislate against those using the newer styles, it was clear the modernists were to be reckoned with.”

Carter takes a middle ground in the postwar debates between Stravinsky and Schoenberg, adapting Nabokov’s description of Stravinsky’s multidimensional freedom (discussed in the previous chapter) into a feature that both sides shared. Carter accomplishes this by divorcing the musical elements from each other so that one aspect may remain strict (a pulse for neoclassicists and pitch-structure for atonalists) while the rest may be free:

Technically, composers of the first half of the 20th century seemed to have been mainly occupied in breaking up the relationships between the various elements of musical discourse and in reintegrating them on a level of greater freedom. The rhythmic aspect of a work often had a comparatively independent life of its own, not emphasizing the harmonic changes or the melodic flow. Harmonies were often used for their sonorous and expressive qualities and not to underline melody. This freedom was usually ordered by new kinds of self-imposed formal and stylistic restrictions. The neoclassicists favoured strict mechanical regularity of pulse while employing great liberty in the irregular distribution of accents and in all the other elements; the atonalists, adhered to a strict system of

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ordering the tones of a composition, allowing the greatest licence (sic) in other directions.\textsuperscript{47}

After equating atonality with twelve-tone composition here, Carter continues by pointing to the increasing prominence of twelve-tone methods in the 1940s: “Around 1940, many composers like the former neoclassicist, Ernst Krenek (1900- ), and the young Italian, Luigi DallaPiccola (sic) (1904 - ), began to use this system as did many others in most important musical centres. It also had an indirect influence on Bartók, and on the Americans, Sessions and Wallingford Riegger (1885- ).”\textsuperscript{48} Thus even composers such as Bartók, who earlier in the article Carter praised as an original thinker, found value in the lessons of twelve-tone composition (Carter does not specify what these lessons might be).

Carter’s second opportunity in 1950 came from William Glock, who requested an article about contemporary American music for \textit{The Score}, a British journal Glock edited. After completing the encyclopedia article in the middle of 1950, Carter finally replied to Glock in September refusing the request. Carter expressed his disappointment with his contemporary American composers and explained that he would not want to place them in a bad light: “I am too disheartened by most of the works of my colleagues to write with any enthusiasm.” Carter instead recommended Richard Franko Goldman, “who apparently feels more hope than I do.” Writing in confidence to Glock, Carter then expanded with some of his own thoughts on the state of American composition:

This year has seen a gradual revolution in contemporary music circles; the two rival organizations, the League of Composers and the ISCM, both were faced with the resignation of their chairmen…Since I am the only one on both boards and never say a word at any meeting, I was nominated

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, 17. Carter does not provide any explanation or evidence for the suggestions that these composers were influenced by twelve-tone methods.
to succeed both of the presidents – I provisionally accepted the ISCM, mostly devoted to 12-tone music which I can stand in small doses, but a little less cliquish than the League. 49

While Carter mostly dismissed twelve-tone composition by his colleagues, he continued to express interest in the music of the Second Viennese School, declaring that the only exciting concerts of the past season were revivals of Webern. He continued by explaining that the problem with twelve-tone composition in America was that students were adopting it without sufficient training to use it successfully: “The young aren’t very well trained and fall easily into the dodecaphonic trap, with its ready-made expression and its Viennese grimaces.” 50 The criticism that students unsuccessfully adopted twelve-tone techniques as a shortcut to avoid intensive training and study became an underlying factor in Carter’s dismissal of twelve-tone composition as a fad throughout the decade, while he simultaneously found examples in which composers were succeeding in using dodecaphony with positive results.

By 1954, when Carter held his residency in Rome, he seems to have found new confidence in the younger generation of American composers. In his essay “Music in the United States,” translated into French for the Belgian journal Synthèses, Carter discusses the development of American audiences in addition to trends in American composition. As in the 1945 outline, Carter divides American composers into those who evoke a “native spirit by the use of folklore or by some other means” and those who use an international style. Within each of these groups he emphasizes variety, from conservative to “extreme.” In the international category, Carter saw tonal and neoclassical composers

49 Meyer and Shreffler, 95.

50 Ibid., 96.
including Samuel Barber and Randall Thompson as conservatives. On the “extreme” side Carter combined the aleatoricism of Cage and Feldman with the electronic music of Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky. I believe he felt comfortable combining these two radically different approaches to composition as “extreme” because neither especially interested him.

Twelve-tone and serial composition falls in the middle of the international style, with Piston and Sessions as the most successful composers occupying this space. Carter explains that Sessions’ “complex” style has gained favor recently in the United States, and his followers have successfully developed his ideas further:

Now his seriousness of purpose and his devotion to the tradition of music have not only won him many listeners but many interesting young followers like Leon Kirchner, Andrew Imbrie, and Milton Babbitt, each of whom uses a more involved technique than has been customary in American music. Apart from the Sessions style, Wallingford Riegger has been writing in a personal type of dodecaphony for a number of years, and recently a new, more expressive way of using the same method has been developed by Ben Weber.51

In a short span of four years, Carter had gone from dismissing the young generation of twelve-tone composers in America as lazy students who had fallen into a trap of ready-made patterns to praising them for their originality in developing new methods from these techniques. Perhaps he saw them undergo the same process as him in the late 1940s, experimenting with twelve-tone writing before discovering his own approach to pitch organization. Most importantly, the defining feature of their compositions became not the techniques, but the individual styles they had developed through serial methods, celebrating the trope of American individualism. His view of these composers as creating divergent approaches to composing with twelve-tones, rather than following a strict and

51Ibid., 114.
perhaps arbitrary system, would allow Carter to later claim that America lacked any definite sense of twelve-tone composition, and thus define himself potentially as a twelve-tone composer.  

In 1954 Carter returned to America from Rome in a new position of prominence, as the winner of an international competition sponsored by the city of Liège. Having seen the success of contemporary music programming in concert halls and on the radio in Europe, he renewed his efforts to promote new music at home. In 1956, Robert Turner of the Canadian Broadcasting Company asked Carter to participate in a program in which contemporary composers talked about masterpieces from the twentieth century. Carter selected Schoenberg’s Orchestral Variations, a work which was not yet available in commercial recordings, but which he heard over the radio in Europe and which influenced his own recently completed Variations for Orchestra.  

While drafting the talk, Carter struggled with how to present the role of twelve-tone methods in the compositional process, and how he thought knowledge of these techniques should affect the listener. In the initial draft, Carter avoided discussing technique too early. Instead he began by positioning the work within Schoenberg’s adoption of classical forms: “The work can be listened to as an ordinary set of variations, like those of Brahms on Haydn’s Theme, and in general layout it resembles this classical

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52 In Carter’s description of American dodecaphony, he anticipates Straus’ argument that twelve-tone composition in America should be defined by the wide variety of manners in which composers make use of the system.

53 I will discuss the competition, along with other accomplishments during this period in greater detail in the next chapter.

54 Elliott Carter to Robert Turner, August 31, 1956, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. Carter proposed as other options Stravinsky’s Symphonie des Psalms and Bartók’s Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. An earlier version of the letter followed these three options with alternate choices by Debussy, Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, and Hindemith, although Carter listed no specific piece for Hindemith.
structure quite closely – for Schoenberg during the period of his life from about 1925
until 194- [sic] very often had recourse to the general plan of classical-romantic music for
his over-all architecture.” Carter then offers a short history of traditional variation
structures:

The layout of such a set of Variations is familiar to any concert goer and
involves, a theme, in this case preceded by an introduction and a set of
short pieces each of somewhat differing character derived more or less
clearly from some aspect of the theme – either the harmonic basis as in
Bach’s Goldberg Variations, or the ornamentation of the theme as in many
a work of Mozart or in the using of one short motive from the theme as a
basis for a short movement. Obviously the relationship with the original
theme can be more or less obscure – sometimes even in the best of
classical works apparently non-existent and this degree of relationship
with the original theme can be made to play a dramatic role in the course
of the set of variations as the theme is gotten away from and then returned
to… The whole key to enjoyment of such a work is to grasp the variety of
characters, their contrasts and their relationship to the original.

Carter thus began by comparing the work to traditional variation forms, and declared that
even in works by the masters it may not be possible for a listener to follow the connection
between theme and variations easily.

After providing a context for hearing Schoenberg’s Variations as a traditional
work, Carter proceeded to discuss the compositional process for Schoenberg as operating
on multiple concurrent levels:

Now Schoenberg’s work is interesting as operating on two different levels
of variation at once, so that not only is each variation related to the theme,
usually in a fairly clear way, but within all the small details, even of the
theme itself there is a constant system of variations going on, and as far as
I can see every detail of the work is directly related in small to a basic
pattern of notes. So that there is an interior structure like the pattern of
bricks on a wall and out of this small material a larger structure is made –
the work itself – which is like using pieces of brick structure to produce an
arcade – a building – a tower.
Only after describing this abstract structure for Schoenberg’s composition does Carter finally bring up twelve-tone methods, which he claims forms the brick structure:

Now this detailed brick structure is what has been called the twelve-tone or twelve-note or dodecaphonic technique although the composer himself was always rather unhappy about its being held up as a technique to be learned but simply referred to it as a method.

By adopting this metaphor of bricks within a building, Carter tries to emphasize that a listener need not hear the twelve-tone rows, nor even recognize they are there at first glance. After the building has drawn the viewers’ attention and interest, these viewers may seek further knowledge about its construction and the patterning of bricks. Carter tried to justify this approach through his statement that Schoenberg did not like the emphasis placed on the method. Thus, listeners can find value in the composition even if they do not follow the twelve-tone system Schoenberg used.

In anticipation of an analysis examining how Schoenberg manipulated the row, Carter explains that the piece can and should be enjoyed by listeners without concern for these structures, again using Bach as a point of comparison:

I make this word of warning since to enjoy this work and see what there is in it – it is again not important to know the operation of the technique anymore than the listener need know harmonic structures to appreciate the works of Bach and yet familiarity with harmony – as complicated a subject… an even more difficult subject to describe in words than the twelve-tone method – does help enormously in enjoying the works of Bach.55

As we see, throughout this initial draft of his talk, Carter attempted to diminish the importance of twelve-tone methods, which he probably assumed could alienate or intimidate many radio listeners. Furthermore, when he did discuss them as useful for the

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55 Elliott Carter, “Schoenberg Lecture,” Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. The first draft includes only a small section of the actual analysis.
listener, knowledge was not needed to “appreciate” the complicated craftsmanship behind Schoenberg’s piece, distinguishing twelve-tone methods from aesthetic judgment. One can appreciate the skill that goes into the production of an artwork they do not enjoy, but knowledge of these background structures may help with enjoyment.

In the final draft of the talk, Carter changed the focus of the introduction to highlight the influence of twelve-tone methods in general and the Variations in particular over young composers:

For this work, written in the composer’s 54th year is the first orchestral piece to use the twelve-tone technique in a thoroughgoing way. It is also the work, which by its extraordinary musical inspiration and expression has established this technique of composition as a significant and important means of contemporary artistic thought. Indeed as more and more works using this technique are written by composers of almost every nationality and of every succeeding generation, especially among those which have appeared since the second war, recognition of these Variations has grown.\[56\]

Despite emphasizing the influence of twelve-tone composition over contemporary composers in this final draft, Carter avoids discussing Schoenberg’s influence or twelve-tone composition in his own works. However, in an earlier draft he addressed his own relationship to twelve-tone methods directly. He described the influence of these methods on younger composers, but claimed that he did not personally find them useful. He also did not completely rule out the possibility of using such an organizational system in his own writing, saying that he probably does subconsciously:

Let me also say that the remarkable amount of thinking, of logical yet realistic musical understanding that supports this method and the authority of the important works using it make it a very persuasive method of composition. Its range is very great as is clear by comparing some of the works of Webern with those of Berg and it is not at all surprising, in fact it

\[56\] Meyer and Shreffler, 141. They believe that Schoenberg’s Variations was highly influential in Carter’s own Variations, which follows the same formal design.
is even encouraging that so many younger composers are using the system. I myself do not use it and probably will not, as I find that the kind of musical ideas I have are hindered in their development by its use. I find that I must have some subconscious system of my own which I am trying to organize and which takes the question of time into account in a way that this 57

The last line of the page containing this draft is ripped off at this point and no later pages survive. We see in this brief section, however, that Carter’s most recent encounter with Schoenberg while composing his own Variations caused him to rethink his own methods and systems.

**Defining His System and Distorting the Boundary**

While his compositions from the late 1940s marked a turning point in Carter’s style from populist neoclassical works to atonal techniques, Carter and others have often pointed to the Second String Quartet, composed in the late 1950s, as his “most representative work.” David Schiff, in the first edition of his study, quotes Carter describing his development during this period as reflecting the influence of the young European avant-garde at Darmstadt. 58 David Harvey, also writing in the 1980s, argued that the works beginning with the Second Quartet are developed from “a systematic exploitation of the work’s source material.” 59 Looking back over Carter’s long career, scholars have not placed as much importance on the idea of a stylistic change in the late


58 See Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (1983), 192-3. Schiff writes that when he asked about the influence of Darmstadt, Carter said at the time he did not find it important, but he postulates in retrospect Carter profited from working with foreign styles: “Like Jacob, he wrestles with angels to become himself. As Carter’s sense of his own individual style has become increasingly confident his confrontations with alien ideas and styles have grown more daring. With every such encounter, the expressive and technical domain of Carter’s music has expanded.”

50s as the one a decade earlier or his adoption of all-interval twelve-tone chords in 1980. However, an examination of these works and Carter’s discussions of them reveals an increasingly systematic approach to his handling of musical material, which in some ways approximates serial techniques.

Upon learning that Carter lectured on Schoenberg’s Variations, William Glock asked him to repeat and expand on the subject at the Dartington summer school in England. Carter would be presenting immediately after Pierre Boulez, who planned to teach analysis. In his response to Glock, Carter began by discussing his initial hesitation to teach twelve-tone composition, which he saw as a small and mostly ignored aspect of the American music scene:

I was, at first, somewhat taken aback when you suggested that I lecture on the Schoenberg Variations. As you must realise, the lecture I gave over CBC was one for lay listeners and explained rather simply the devices Schoenberg used in that work. Since I was very much impressed by the performance of the work we both heard in Baden-Baden, I set myself the task of learning about it and amidst a rather busy season I read Leibowitz, etc. and learned all the pertinent information that the 12-tone school has developed about it. I am, therefore, in no sense an original or even deeply critical appreciator of the music, and had really not intended to become one, since in the context of American society the question of 12-tone music is restricted to a small [and] not influential – although interesting – group. Very few have bothered to grasp the basic principles even, since such music has been hideously unpopular among critics, performers, and college departments. The story of Krenek’s long-suffering life of rejection has dramatized this point here.

In the end, he accepted what he saw as the challenge of teaching these methods. Perhaps Carter believed that further study of twelve-tone techniques would help him in developing his own methods, adopting the challenge he had presented to himself in the previously discussed draft of the radio broadcast:
Anyhow, I do not claim to have very good ideas on the 12-tone school or, for that matter, on the question of musical analysis, which in its present incarnation had its main principles laid down by Alban Berg et al. Nevertheless your suggestion has acted as a challenge to me and I must say I welcome the stimulus to find my way around in the 12-tone literature, much of which I have enjoyed without bothering to count to a dozen.\textsuperscript{60}

While Schoenberg’s Variations and twelve-tone composition was only one of the many topics Carter taught at Dartington (the proposed list he sent to Glock also includes works by Stravinsky and Debussy), the experience left a lasting impact on his memory. Carter frequently recalls teaching Schoenberg at Dartington, remembering that the only student who had any interest was Peter Maxwell Davies.\textsuperscript{61}

While developing the new and more systematic approach of his Second Quartet in the late 1950s, Carter also began to reconsider his vision of the American twelve-tone and serial community as one that could include himself. No longer was the community in America part of an internationalizing trend. Instead, American serial composers differed fundamentally in their philosophical standpoint from the European school, as Carter described to Gilbert Chase, a music historian and diplomat:

> In Europe, the search for emancipated musical discourse has been much more closely associated with the twelve-tone system than in the United States…But the European school seems to have become occupied with pattern alone, hoping somehow that interest and meaning would emerge. Even on their own admission, this has not always been the case. In the United States, the tendency has been to start with a coordinating principle having to do with techniques of listening or to begin

\textsuperscript{60} Meyer and Shreffler, 148. Carter’s decision to list Berg and not Schoenberg or Webern is particularly odd. Possibly the influence of Schoenberg over his own recent Variations led Carter to feel that Schoenberg’s methods were too far afield from contemporary twelve-tone composers, but there is no indication why he would not have used Webern as a model instead, as so many twelve-tone and serial composers of the era did.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 147-149. Carter included Stravinsky’s Symphony in Three Movements, one of Stravinsky’s non-serial compositions, but later in the letter Carter mentions a trip to Los Angeles during which he heard the Canticum Sacrum, suggesting that he enjoyed Stravinsky’s new serial compositions as well.
with our experience of time and not some arbitrary numerological formula. Examples of emancipated discourse in America are beginning to be more numerous.  

Carter allows himself to speak about “our” experience and concerns as a serial composer because he greatly expands the definition of serialism to emphasize the idea of beginning with a “co-ordinating principle,” presumably including the connections between pitch, timbre, and interval that Carter would use in his Double Concerto. The American serialist, unlike the European one, uses this as an underlying basis for constructing a musical narrative. In Europe the pattern or structure formed the entirety of the work. Over the next few years, the expansive definition of American serialism Carter develops here would form the basis for including himself within the serial community as he saw fit.

In 1960 Carter further refined the image of himself as a member of the serial community and the position of American serialism in general. In an article for *The New York Times* discussing his experience as a judge at the ISCM festival in Cologne, Carter began by addressing the supposed domination of the ISCM by twelve-tone composers:

> Besides these technical matters, another question that we all took into consideration was presented to us by the society’s president, Dr. Heinrich Strobel, before we looked at the scores. He pointed out that the I.S.C.M., as well as the German Radio itself had been the subject of much criticism in various quarters as being the promoters of twelve-tone music. We all agreed that it was as undesirable to promote this school as it was equally undesirable to promote the experimental school of Darmstadt – that we were interested in artistic quality no matter in what style it presented itself.

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63 It is interesting to note that while Carter’s partial embrace of serialism seems to align with the period in which Broyles, Hubbs, and others begin their serial tyranny; Carter’s writings from the time seem to dismiss American serialism as a niche method with little following among audiences, critics, or students. He seems to have felt that whatever fad there was among students in the beginning of the decade had mostly passed on and now the few left were often doing interesting things by expanding these methods to fit their own purposes.
As a judge, when he had the opportunity to listen to the numerous works, Carter explained that he found the success of twelve-tone composers justified because they wrote the best compositions:

After looking through all the scores, however, although this matter was never again referred to, it was obvious to me that the preponderance of well-written, carefully planned works had some connection with the twelve-tone world. Most of the others were definitely of inferior character, a thing that was not true even seven years ago.64

Carter’s decision to describe the successful works as “carefully planned” suggests that he placed an emphasis on the values espoused by serial composition. Based on his own descriptions of musical values elsewhere, one might have expected him to describe successful works as those that communicated effectively. As we will see in his discussions of Il Canto Sospeso, Carter did believe that twelve-tone and serial works could communicate effectively.

In the New York Times article Carter addressed a general public, and apparently felt the need to defend the prominence of twelve-tone and serial methods. In the same year he wrote a more technical article, “Shop Talk with An American Composer,” for Musical Quarterly, readers of which may have assumed he was a serial composer. In “Shop Talk” Carter provided the most highly detailed discussions of his music to date. The article also marks the beginning of Carter’s embrace of a question and answer format to structure his ideas in print. While presented as the transcript of a talk Carter gave at Princeton University, the drafts for the article reveal that his answers were heavily revised and carefully crafted, especially the introduction, which sought to provide a background for many of his answers to questions dealing with twelve-tone and serial

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In this introduction Carter discusses the challenges for a composer talking about his processes and the prominence of compositional fads in the twentieth century:

In any discussion of specifically contemporary procedures, there are a few serious risks involved that must be constantly borne in mind. The first is the danger of rapid and wide dissemination of oversimplified formulas that shortens their life. It is obvious that one technical fad after another has swept over 20th-century music as the music of each of its leading composers has come to be intimately known. Each fad lasted a few years, only to be discarded by the succeeding generation of composers, then by the music profession, and finally by certain parts of the interested public.

Carter traces these fads from the parallel 9th chords of Impressionists to the current obsession with Schoenberg and Webern. Carter ends the introduction with the statement that his rhythmic procedures do not fit into the fad tendency:

All this is to say that I do not consider my rhythmic procedures a trick or a formula. I do not even feel that they are an integral part of my musical personality, especially in the way I used them in my First String Quartet (1951), which delves elaborately into polyrhythms. As I have suggested, all aspects of a composition are closely bound together, and for this reason I cannot give an orderly exposition of any without bringing in a large perspective of ideas.

Here, Carter continues to differentiate his approach, which may fit into the broadly defined American idea of serialism, from what he perceives to be the European obsession with structure as the ultimate determinate of meaning and value in a composition.

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65 I have not found a recording or transcription of the original talk. The drafts reveal no changes to the questions themselves, so I presume that they remain faithful to the symposium, but as I will detail the answers can differ rather dramatically.


67 Carter may have felt inspired to address it and view it as a fad again due to the questions that dealt with twelve-tone composition, which he may not have expected.

In an earlier draft of the introduction, however, Carter stressed the importance of a “ruling construction.” This serves the same function as Carter’s description of American serial composers relying on co-ordinating principles in the previous decade:

This brings me to my own views on these matters. To me all the bits and pieces of a composition, all the techniques, all the motions over large sections must come from a ruling conception, more today than ever before. How things hang together, how one idea enhances another, how what goes before effects what comes later, it is in this domain that serious music lives, and gains its power.69

What differentiated Carter’s compositions from the fads of twelve-tone and other systems before him was that he created a new system for each composition:

To me, therefore, this sense of a composition being a kind of world very much interrelated in all its aspects, its motions and gestures being intimately related to its various techniques dominates my thinking. Each work of mine has lived in its own world, with its own techniques that sometimes carry over from one work to the next or even come from outside influences and traditional techniques but are all very much reworked to suit the needs of the particular work.70

Throughout his drafts of the introduction, serialism and/or twelve-tone composition seemed to occupy a great deal of Carter’s thoughts. In an intermediate draft of the article, Carter tried to go into more detail about the function of twelve-tone methods arguing that they should only be viewed as a small factor contributing to a wide variety of works, paralleling his discussion of twelve-tone methods providing a foundation in his lecture on Schoenberg’s Variations. However, writing for a musically literate audience, Carter avoided the brick analogy in favor of comparing the system to a

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69 Elliott Carter “Shop Talk by an American Composer draft,” Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

70 Ibid.
In the drafting process we find that while making this analogy he was initially uncertain what factors he saw in the parallel. First he described the twelve-tone system as controlling harmonic function paralleling the fugue’s control over texture and development. Unhappy with this correlation, Carter crossed it out (represented here with a strike-through) and revised the statement by adding intervallic order as a factor controlled by both twelve-tone techniques and the fugue, but removing development:

The twelve-tone system, for instance, is a familiar example of such a device, that is now usurping the role the fugue used to play in being in a certain milieu a public demonstration of compositional skill. The twelve-tone system which tends to control harmonic function as the fugue did that of texture and development.

By changing the analogy from development to intervallic order, Carter continued to explain that these were relatively minimal features, and that twelve-tone works could contain the same variety as fugues written by numerous composers over the previous centuries:

As well neither controls many of the most salient features of a composition. Comparison of fugues, from Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Strauss, Berg, Stravinsky and Hindemith immediately show how many facets of composition fugue does not control. Similarly comparison of the twelve-tone works of the Viennese three, and their first with their late ones reveal an enormous stylistic and technical variety made up of features the twelve-tone system does not affect. Looked at from within the eyes of Schoenberg, for instance, one could easily imagine why he felt that too much emphasis had been placed on this system since to him his works proceeded from some sort of a unified conception that required many interrelated techniques to bring to realization. Thus to describe the twelve-tone technique of any individual work is to describe one a small facet of it,

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and one that is not always its most interesting or striking side. To me this all seems quite obvious, as it must to you.\(^2\)

Overall, Carter takes a rather broad vision of twelve-tone methods, and by comparing dodecaphony to fugues and listing numerous composers who had composed radically different fugues, Carter proposes that twelve-tone methods may be adopted in a similarly occasional way, producing equally varied results.

In the question and answer section of the article, the issue of Carter’s use or non-use of twelve-tone composition came up directly with the question: “Do you use the twelve-tone system?”\(^7\) In his initial draft of the article, Carter provides what I believe to be the most straightforward and accurate answer to the question he could:

No, I do not. Since so many do use it, I suppose I should heed to explain what might now be considered an aberration. I have frequently tried to use it, for I would welcome anything that would simplify or coordinate the task of composing, but I find that I personally am unable to find a way of using it that will allow me to accomplish the kind of composition I try to write. It just seems like a needless hindrance as far as I am concerned.

In the final version, however, Carter turns the question into an opportunity for a joke, avoiding the question in a sense:

Some critics have said that I do, but since I have never analyzed my works from this point of view, I cannot say. I assume that if I am not conscious of it, I do not. Naturally out of interest and out of professional responsibility I have studied the important works of the type and admire many of them a great deal. I have found that it is apparently inapplicable to what I am trying to do, and is more of a hindrance than a help. Its nature is often misunderstood, it is a building material and not the building, and it allows, I think, for certain greater freedoms than were possible using traditional harmony with its very strict rules of part-writing, just as reinforced concrete allows for certain construction patterns impossible with stone. I must also say that having known many of these works all of my adult life, I hope the recent fad will not cause them to seem

\(^2\) Ibid. Draft dated Dec. 13. I have struck through for the material Carter crossed out in his draft.

\(^7\) Shop Talk, 196.
commonplace too soon. The results of total serialization are more recalcitrant to musical handling, I think.\textsuperscript{74}

Thus, Carter turns the question into a joke and an attack on critics for their lack of knowledge in their reviews. He includes a brief mention of the fact that he had tried it and not found it useful, but in moving into the idea of twelve-tone methods as a material and not the building, he leaves open the idea that his materials may be similar.

Over the next few years, Carter evolved this position of possibly creating twelve-tone compositions into claiming that there was no such thing as a unified mode of twelve-tone composition. In doing so, Carter broadened the boundary of the community so that he could include himself when he wanted. Previously Carter had praised the variety of American twelve-tone composers, now he claimed that this variety was so great that one could not define it. Thus, Carter was neither a twelve-tone composer nor a non-twelve-tone composer, but rather one of many composers whose compositions made use of the twelve-tones.

Paul Freeman wrote to Carter in April of 1961 asking for comments about his use of the twelve-tone technique for Freeman’s doctoral dissertation research:

As the thesis project in fulfillment of the Ph.D. requirements in Theory at the Eastman School of Music, I wish to make a study of the “Influence of Twelve-Tone Technique upon American Composers.” Having heard some of your works, I would appreciate knowing more about your approach to dodecaphonic writing and feel that this information would be very helpful in assimilating materials for this dissertation.

Perhaps the following could serve as a point of departure:

1) How does your approach to twelve-tone writing differ from that of Arnold Schoenberg?
2) Do you attempt to combine dodecaphonic principles with tonality?
3) Please send a list of your compositions which are strongly influenced by or written in the “twelve-tone” system. Please indicate where these works can be obtained.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
Freeman did not ask Carter specifically if his pieces used the twelve-tone system, perhaps because he was already familiar with Carter’s statement in “Shop Talk.” The question of influence seems appropriate for Carter based on the discussions in Shop Talk, and his apparent willingness to discuss ideas of influence in other articles, such as his 1955 “The Rhythmic Basis of American Music.” Carter, however, mostly dismissed the line of questioning. First he draws on the attitude of Babbitt and other serial composers of the 1950s to claim that Schoenberg was not a “true” twelve-tone composer. Carter then twists these positions for his own uses to claim that twelve-tone composition does not really exist. As such, twelve-tone analysis has no validity as an analytical approach to his or perhaps any other composer’s compositions because even if the theorist can point to the use of rows they would do little for the listener:

In reference to your questions about 12-tone technique, I do not consider the 12-tone technique as having a true existence.
I think that Arnold Schoenberg was a great composer but not a strict or true twelve-tone composer – if such a thing exists or can exist.
Since dodecaphony does not exist, in my opinion I cannot say whether I 'attempt' to combine etc. Whatever I do in my compositions, I do for “artistic” reasons and I do not attempt anything else except to write my compositions.

Having dismissed the idea of attempting to write twelve-tone compositions, Carter next turned to the idea of influence, and again he dismissed the line of questioning. In later interviews Carter has spoken about the importance of Schoenberg’s influence, extending well beyond twelve-tone methods. But in his response to Freeman, Carter staked out a claim for independence, saying all possible influences were equal and indistinguishable.

75 Paul Freeman to Elliott Carter, April 1961, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

to him as an artist. He then continued by stating that world events influenced him more than music, a topic which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter:

All my compositions are or are not influenced by the music of what are called ‘12-tone composers’ as much as they are influenced by Guillaume de Machaut, Bach, Beethoven – I cannot distinguish nor can I say that I am consciously influenced more by one composer than another – the daily newspaper (particularly these days) influences me more than anything else (not, of course, on the music page).

Carter ends his response by providing a justification for the harsh tone of his letter, stating that his music is meant to be heard rather than written about:

Kindly forgive my apparently absurd approach – unhelpful for a thesis. My music is to be heard and not written about, whatever is to be said about it is to be said by others – perhaps they can find 12 tones in it, as for me I say as the host said to the person who asked for a second helping – “Who counts?”

Carter’s response to Freeman is fascinating because he explicitly says he does not consider himself a twelve-tone composer, but he also allows and possibly invites the analyst to approach his compositions from a twelve-tone perspective at a later time. Carter’s non-twelve-tone composition is a result of there being no such thing as twelve-tone composition, rather than him employing different methods from his colleagues.

In the summer of 1963, upon returning from another year-long residency in Rome, Carter gave a series of lectures about his own music and contemporary music in

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77 Elliott Carter to Paul Freeman, undated, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. Carter’s idea that audiences should ignore any possible theoretic or systematic frameworks used in the compositional process was supported by Howard Taubman’s articles in the New York Times about the premiere of the Second String Quartet: “The basic philosophy of both quartets is that changes of speed are of the very essence of the musical material and that these speeds interact in a way to give the music its special character and communication. The Second Quartet marks both a refinement and an advance on the technical accomplishments. But don’t let analytical discussion draw your attention from the main point.” See Howard Taubman, “Quartet With Art and Style” New York Times April 3, 1960: X9 (a week earlier, Taubman wrote an initial review of the quartet, which followed similar themes).
general at Dartmouth University. In these talks, designed for a general audience, Carter continued to break down the boundary between his own methods and serialism. After his time in Europe, Carter seemed convinced that European serial composers were also developing interesting, individualized, and effective methods of composition, moving beyond the obsession with technique he had criticized them for previously.

One of the pieces he spoke about at great length was the second movement of Luigi Nono’s *Il Canto Sospeso*, claiming it was “one of the best works I think that has been written since the war by a European.” Nono’s composition became exemplary of effective European serialism for Carter, both due to the extensive control placed on nearly all parameters of music, and because he found the work moving. Throughout his discussions, Carter demonstrated that he was emotionally affected by Nono’s setting of Thomas Mann’s text, which he recited at the start of his discussion: “I am dying for a world which is so full of beautiful light. Millions of men have died for it on barricades in the war. I am dying for justice our idea will win.” Carter continued to explain that despite the extensive technical accomplishment of the composition, the technique itself did not create the power of the setting, positioning the work within his previous description of American serialism as providing a background structure, but not the substance of a composition.

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78 Carter discusses many of the same topics in his article “Letter from Europe” *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 2 (Spring, 1963): 195-205, however, he does not discuss the potential effectiveness he finds possible in total serial works, instead comparing the results to those created by aleatoric composition. He seems to feel that serialism, while effective in the previous decade, when used by Nono has reached an endpoint because it is no longer used for expression.

Carter’s embrace at this point of a broadly defined serial community that included both American and European approaches might reflect his displeasure with the growth of aleatoric composition as the leading alternative to serial methods. Carter argued that works composed using aleatoric methods could never produce more than instantaneous stimulation. Due to the improvisatory and random nature of their performances, these works lacked the content that makes good music deeply moving and powerful:

In the United States advanced artistic endeavor are presented in colleges in order to stimulate the students… it might be a very entertaining thing to stimulate people but it’s not a very useful thing if all you do is excite them and then they go home and that’s that, just like having an automobile accident, if you go home afterwards. This is much more than just something stimulating and strange and peculiar, it came out of a very intense and important expressive need and a very interesting vision of the music and of the world, it is not something that comes out of a random madness of thought or a desire for self-expression or desire for non-conformity, these are all things you can say about it, but this is not the generating force. The generating force is something much more important than that, and this is what I feel is very rarely understood in this country, it’s very disturbing.

For Carter a major problem with aleatoric methods is that they deny the composer the ability to communicate with audiences, an idea behind all of his compositions from throughout his career.

In a later lecture in the Dartmouth series, Carter complained that audiences were mostly concerned with twelve-tone and electronic composition, missing his larger argument that such techniques should be considered secondary to artistic expression and

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80 Elliott Carter, “Dartmouth Lectures,” August 8, 1963, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. This lecture came on the heels of Carter’s teaching at Yale, where he found his students poorly prepared. As he wrote to Kurt Stone: “Really, I felt that it was too depressing to fuss with students who seemed too poorly prepared to do advanced work or trying to write a kind of conventional music that I have no sympathy for” (Letter from Elliott Carter to Kurt Stone, November 1962, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung). In a way, Carter’s critique may be considered unfair because in America he often referred to the failings and problems he found in students and student compositions, while in Europe there is little indication that he interacted with students except in brief summer courses; instead he heard works by leading professionals.
communication: “I always find that whenever I am interviewed there are two questions which people ask… what do you think about twelve-tone music and… what do you think about electronic music. No one ever asks what do you think about flute music?” In his portrayal of this question, Carter takes what I consider a populist turn, trying to appeal to broad audiences not interested in contemporary methods. In equating twelve-tone and electronic music, Carter draws on the scientific associations of both, and in dismissing them as less valuable than “flute music” he undermines even the traditional uses many composers had derived for twelve-tone methods. By pointing to his interest in “flute music,” Carter draws an accessible association with the classical music tradition, and as we will see he foreshadows his later emphasis on viewing his own music as continuing an instrument and timbre centric tradition from the 19th century. Having defined twelve-tone composition here in scientific terms by placing it parallel to electronic composition, Carter distances himself from it by calling it a dying fad (we could say that he re-interprets this idea from Boulez): “This is almost a style that has universally been used by almost all composers since the war including older composers and at the present time is about to die out in a way, although all the lessons that were learned in writing this had a very strong effect.”81 Only a few years after he told Freeman that he could not identify how twelve-tone techniques may have influenced him, at Dartmouth Carter explained that twelve-tone composition taught composers about constant rotation and variation in patterns of tones.82

81 Ibid.

With regard to the idea of strictness, Carter related a conversation he had with the Italian composer Goffredo Petrassi, who thought that the scientism associated with strictness of method gave composers an important place in society: “Petrassi said to me well maybe the reason why is that composers today feel very much on the defensive and they would like to feel that they too are respectable members of society and are doing something which can be explained clearly and people can accept as an important kind of a contribution.” This sparked a return to Nono’s *Il Canto Sospeso* in the lecture series and Carter presented an even more detailed analysis of the work’s serial procedures. Throughout, Carter emphasized aspects he did not understand yet, suggesting that even in such a strictly controlled and serialized piece he felt that there was some freedom left to the composer in determining the final sound: “there must be some kind of a system of choice that makes these works effective and eliminates the parts, the features which would be ineffective in such a mathematical routine.” Carter’s assumption that choice comes at the end of the process reflects his own technique. At the time, Carter began the compositional process with a strict theoretical framework regarding intervals, timbres, and rhythms, but then proceeded freely as he wished to compose, often leaving little audible trace of the framework.

Carter transitioned from his discussion of serialism and twelve-tone composition to aleatoric composition. He explained that he felt aleatoric methods limit expression, as opposed to serialism, which as seen in the Nono example can heighten it.

As I say this [serialism] was for a long time a universal method of composing, almost all the young composers have done this, it became a rage around 1954 I guess and almost all pieces have been written this way.

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83 *Ibid.* The idea of composers using scientific language as a means of justifying their art in terms of larger society has been associated with Milton Babbitt’s theoretical discussions of serialism in America.
until another series of ideas began to come in, and that is the notion which actually some people claim was brought in by John Cage, the notion of improvisation and what Boulez called aleatoric music… I feel about improvisation that it is a more limited form of musical expression and composition within itself.  

Carter continued to explain that good performers do not actually improvise in the true sense, but rather work from a collection of set patterns, resulting in works that are more restricted than compositions written out and carefully constructed.

As an example, Carter recalled an organist during his time studying in Paris who would request a theme from the audience and then improvise long pieces reminiscent of Caesar Franck based on the theme. The problem was that when Carter returned with his fellow students for subsequent performances it was always the same, even when they presented him with a twelve-tone row as a theme. For Carter everyone began with improvisation, but a composer, such as himself, had the freedom and ability to transform these improvisations into incredibly varied and carefully constructed pieces:

I do improvisation at home, while the performer does it on the stage so to speak and among all the possible improvisations I choose the particular parts of the piece which seem… both lively and also fitting to the piece in some organic way and hence one is not as a composer of my kind caught in the moment one can juggle with time at home at the desk in a way that no improviser could ever do because he is caught right there in the moment and if something goes wrong, if the trumpet cracks or something happens that moment is lost, while I can doodle with moments and I can shift them around, put one moment before the other or after the other and all kinds of things and improve a moment or not and correct it and change it, which in a way gives a great deal more freedom than these people who are caught in the physical process of time and I also in my, perhaps I am sold in this particular idea that it gives a great deal more liveliness ultimately when the works are played with any real comprehension.

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84 Ibid.
Ultimately Carter confessed that aleatoric compositions had some value in their ability to stir audiences who had become too complacent by turning the concert hall into a theater, but this value was separate from the lasting and meaningful works he sought to write. A successful aleatoric work for Carter merely served as an evening’s entertainment.\(^{86}\)

Amid the growth of aleatoric compositions, Carter found himself more closely aligned with serialism. Both his compositions and the serial compositions he enjoyed, such as *Il Canto Sospeso*, aimed to communicate with the audience. Furthermore, both explored the limits of traditional performance methods, contrasting extreme dynamics, complex rhythms, and non-traditional pitch structures and relationships. The difference became one of degree – how strictly would one follow the preconstructed plan – rather than kind. Meanwhile, aleatoric compositions prevented the composer from communicating directly with an audience because the sound constantly changed in dramatic ways with new performers and interpretations.

Carter, however, continued to struggle with critics’ and writers’ identification of him as a twelve-tone composer. After the performance of the Double Concerto at the Tanglewood Festival, Carter complained to Paul Fromm that the reviewer’s designation of Carter as a twelve-tone composer was among “his long list of misinformation.”\(^{87}\) An even more egregious error was pointed out to Carter in a letter from Samuel Randlett, a writer for *Clavier* magazine planning a review of John Gillespie’s *Five Centuries of

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\(^{86}\) During the Dartmouth lectures, Carter described seeing a performance by Sylvano Bussotti in these terms, comparing it to a Laurel and Hardy comedy.

\(^{87}\) Elliott Carter to Paul Fromm, August 26, 1956, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
According to Randlett, Gillespie credits Carter with “three piano sonatas and a work called *Music for Piano*” in addition to including him in a list of “composers using twelve-tone techniques.” In his response, Carter could have easily included the use of twelve-tone composition as another of the many mistakes by Gillespie, however, he takes a moment in the middle of an otherwise jocular letter to speak about the poorly defined nature of twelve-tone composition:

> As for ‘Composers Using Twelve-Tone Techniques’, I am not sure what this means (especially when employed in the plural – I mean techniques) I certainly have never used a twelve-tone row as the basis of a composition, in the way described in Schoenberg’s *Style and Idea*, nor are my compositions a constant rotation of various permutations of twelve-tone rows. You can count to twelve, however, more often in them than in Mozart, who employed “twelve-tone technique” at the beginning of the C-minor Piano Concerto and for the stone guest in Don Giovanni.”

In the early 1960s, Carter felt that he had finally developed an effective compositional method and he was receiving worldwide recognition for his recent works, but he struggled to define his methods for the public. His initial instinct to differentiate himself strongly from serialism and twelve-tone composition was unsuccessful because critics continued to associate his complex and dense atonality with twelve-tone or serial methods. While he spent the beginning of the 1960s trying to find his own position within the serial community, broadening definitions of twelve-tone and serial composition where necessary, he continued to find that critics misrepresented his techniques and methodologies to the public. Carter finally found a new way to discuss his music through

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89 Elliott Carter to Samuel Randlett, April 11, 1966, Elliott Carter Collection.
the critic Eric Salzman, who coined the term “new virtuosity” in his 1967 history of twentieth-century music.

**New Virtuosity and a New Identity**

Eric Salzman traveled within many of the same circles as Carter, studying initially under Babbitt and Sessions at Princeton in the 1950s and then with Petrassi and Nono in Italy. As a writer for the *New York Times*, Salzman interviewed Carter upon the completion of the Second Quartet in 1960. When he wrote an introductory book about music of the twentieth century music, Salzman had a firm grasp of the wide variety of approaches composers were using over the past twenty years, and how Carter’s compositions fit into the larger world. Salzman sought to explain the philosophical approach of Carter’s composition rather than the technical, devising the category of “The New Performed Music,” which formed the last chapter of the book under the larger section heading of the avant-garde.

For Salzman the idea of a “New Performed Music” combined the lessons of serialism, which he calls ultrarationality, and aleatoricism, or anti-rationality, to expand the possibilities of music:

> It is the actual range of perception and comprehension that is involved, and the new music is ‘about’ the quality and nature of heightened experience, perception, thought, and understanding, communicated throughout the range of human capacities. There is here a new totality of forms and psychological validities which come out of a universalized experience but which are re-established in particular by each work.⁹¹

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⁹⁰ Eric Salzman, “Unity in Variety” *The New York Times* (Mar 20, 1960). While I have not found a correspondence between Carter and Salzman the two were presumably friends because Carter wrote a recommendation for his appointment to Queens College in 1966.

He continues to describe the aim of this new music as not having fixed goals, but rather emphasizing transformations taking place in every dimension and throughout the range of perception: “These transformations become ways of acting, experiencing, and relating action and experience (i.e., of knowing), and they can actually alter, extend, and redefine the quality and limits of our ability to perceive and comprehend.”\textsuperscript{92} Thus the conception of a “new performed music” had virtuosity working on multiple levels, valuing the complexity of contemporary compositional methods, the difficulty of performing the new works, and the challenges they posed to listeners. Salzman points to various works from the mid-1950s as showing traces of this trend, including Nono’s \textit{Il Canto Sospeso} in addition to compositions by Stockhausen, Boulez, and Babbitt, but he declares Carter the primary composer, to whom “the development of this ‘new virtuosity’ can be traced.”\textsuperscript{93}

The community of composers Salzman places within the “new performed music” was even broader than Carter’s expansive definition of twelve-tone music, ranging from European serialists such as Nono and Boulez to American aleatoric composers such as Earle Brown. Carter often stressed virtuosity of various types in his lectures. When discussing Nono’s \textit{Il Canto Sospeso}, he commented on how the widely fluctuating dynamics and pointillistic rhythms resulted in choral sounds he did not believe could be accurately produced. On the other hand Carter spoke highly of a virtuosic performance given by Bussotti of an aleatoric work that reminded him of a Laurel and Hardy comedy. While Carter’s demands on his performers consist almost entirely of traditional techniques, the category as designated by Salzman does not, yet I believe it is precisely

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 172.
this vagueness, focusing on the resultant performance/sound rather than compositional technique or method that drew Carter to this means of self-identification.

Carter adopted Salzman’s language to describe himself almost immediately, and simultaneously he became more forceful in his rejection of serialism. In a 1967 lecture series conducted in Minnesota, Carter began by using Salzman’s terms to describe himself, saying: “this kind of intellectual publicity of some sort of a catchword like aleatoric or electronic has no relation to my music. I discovered as a matter of fact in a book that just came out written by the critic Eric Salzman what my music was and I had never really noticed it before.” Carter then quoted rather extensively from Salzman:

The development of ‘new virtuosity’ can be traced in the work of Elliott Carter, a pupil of Nadia Boulanger whose initial view was neoclassic and, in great part, concerned with vocal music. At the end of the 40s and early 50s, Carter began to expand his vocabulary in the direction of a non-twelve-tone instrumental chromaticism. Works like the intense first quartet, based on long, contrapuntal…’ I’m sorry I don’t want to go on with this but the point about it is if I can find the thing in which he describes the performing aspect. ‘In the second quartet the four players are separated in physical space and completely individualized in their musical way of speaking; the parts are related by a common virtuosity - the kind of highly ornamented fantasy style in which the ‘embellishments’ and colors are not merely decorative but organic and essential – and yet each has its distinct characteristics of pitch, rhythm, and dynamic. The totality of the piece is a confluence of divergent currents which retain their identity while remaining essential parts of the larger flow.⁹⁴

After quoting Salzman, Carter explained that he felt it most accurately described what he was doing, while maintaining that the idea of a ‘new virtuosity’ was not a concern at the time of composition. Instead he explained that he was trying to write music that fit the identity of the instrument, dating this concept back to 1945 and the Piano Sonata. Even if

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⁹⁴ Elliott Carter, “Minnesota Workshop,” July 4, 1967, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. The quotations come from Salzman, 172. I have included punctuation from Salzman’s text, although have not changed the few words which differed in Carter’s reading, none of which alter the meaning.
he had not considered the idea of new virtuosity, by quoting Salzman at length as he did, Carter adopted this identity, which he felt most closely described his works. Perhaps he was drawn to the label because it really says nothing about actual methods, as we see in its usage to describe such a wide variety of composers.

After establishing this new identity, Carter treated serialism more harshly in this lecture than he did a few years earlier at Dartmouth, returning to his vision of it as a passing fad. When the topic of serial and twelve-tone composition first came up, Carter spoke about Schoenberg and Webern, arguing that the serial composers who used these methods as determinants in musical composition had missed the point. Carter emphasized that while serial methods in works by Schoenberg and Webern provided strict structure in some regards, the primary importance of twelve-tone composition was enabling freedom for the vast majority of parameters, allowing the composers to develop ideas they had explored in their earlier atonal works: “The serial method in Webern I think allowed him a freedom which he might not have been able to achieve without it, that is, the serial method gives a fundamental coordination to all the material and therefore a sense of freedom in its ordering in time and its method of construction.”

While Carter claimed he did not use twelve-tone techniques, in his lecture about the Piano Concerto he continued to talk about Schoenberg’s approach to twelve-tone composition. Carter told the audience about his attempts to analyze a composition by Schoenberg in the 1930s: “we had the experience of writing to Schoenberg and asking whether E-flat shouldn’t have been E because it was the sixth note of the row and he

would write back and say it didn’t matter.” By suggesting that Schoenberg did not think an error in pitch material based on the rows mattered, Carter set up his analysis of pitch in his own composition, suggesting that things such as all-interval tetrachords do not really matter for the listener. Thus, Carter presented himself not as a serial composer, but one who learned Schoenberg’s most important lesson, using technique as a background for free composition. He compared the analysis of structure and methods that he was performing on his own composition to solving a crossword puzzle. Furthermore, sometimes the compositional solution produced by these complex procedures had no effect on the sound:

In that very noisy place where everybody plays all the things there are 84 notes sounded together, 72 by the orchestra and the remaining 12 by the piano and there are little holes left in the orchestra for those notes to be played by the piano. Actually you can’t hear that, it wouldn’t make any difference as far as I can see whether they were doubled or not, but this is a kind of a conceit.

Problem solving, however, could not determine an entire composition, the job of the composer as Carter put it was taking the solutions to the crossword puzzle and “finally deciding to write a sentence.”

Carter continued the comparison with Schoenberg’s legacy by presenting the Piano Concerto as a turning point, in which his music began to “fall into twelve-tone patterns,” thanks in part to the construction of his harmony book in the compositional process: “This to me was a very fascinating thing, I never thought of doing this before and part of the whole building up of this theoretical construct was one of the things that

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96 Carter is unclear on who he means by “we.” If he had sent and received the letter himself he most likely would have kept a copy, or would have mentioned this again in his numerous discussions throughout his career concerning Schoenberg, whom he never met.

was very time consuming as you can imagine but it was also a very fascinating one.”

Thus, Carter simultaneously presents his music in a way that more closely approximates the pre-compositional emphasis on technique and construction of serial composers, while also arguing that the vast majority of serial composers missed the point. Carter attempted to adopt the legacy of Schoenberg and Webern in his own music, taking the most important antecedents for postwar serialism. When Carter turned to an analysis of Nono’s *Il Canto Sospeso* in this lecture series he seemed more skeptical. He introduced Nono’s composition by saying it was “built on what might be considered an artificial order but produced a work that in many ways is a very remarkable piece of musical expression.” However, he then gave a warning concerning the work’s effectiveness: “I’ve gotten hesitant about this.”

Carter began the analysis of the second movement by contrasting Nono’s row with those used by Schoenberg and Webern, claiming Nono’s row lacked thematic material: “it really doesn’t make any difference what the row of this work is since it is not a thematic work at all, it’s main characteristic is a series of just notes, separate notes usually played by just one instrument or sung by one choral part after another and it makes clouds of sound.” Then, when he tried to play excerpts from the work, Carter had difficulty with the recording, which forced him to speak freely and answer questions while assistants tried to fix the machinery. In these off-the-cuff remarks, Carter voiced his opinion that serial works lack a clear identity: “In any case, it proves, partly… that these pieces in some way don’t have any sense of shape, they have their remarkable moments in them and they are also almost too much alike in character. It’s always the

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same technique of little spots of sound that sneak in and out.” Still speaking extemporaneously he discussed the leading European serialists: Boulez, Stockhausen and Nono together: “well what bothered me was that these people both seem to have not found any future for themselves they came to a certain point, wrote some very interesting works and then there seems to have been very little that they have been able to do in the last 3 or 4 or 5 years.”

Carter continued to present an image of himself as writing complex and avant-garde music that was not quite serial, but shared some of the same philosophical aims of the academic serial composers in a 1968 High Fidelity feature by Richard Kostelanetz. Kostelanetz began with extensive praise from other composers for Carter, while avoiding any discussion of Carter’s methods and techniques:

Among the professionals of contemporary music, who comprise a scene riddled with dissension, no positive opinion seems more diversely accepted, if not more ecumenical, than Elliott Carter’s excellence as a composer. To Milton Babbitt, definitely of the twelve-tone persuasion, Carter is “one of our two best composers, Roger Sessions being the other.” To Aaron Copland, totem figure of the mainstream, “Everybody agrees that he is in complete command of what he wants to do. You can hear any new work of his with confidence.” The young composer-critic Benjamin Boretz observes that Carter and Babbitt have “made the decisive discoveries, and have developed musical languages which are not only unmistakably their own, but which have also crystallized the musical thinking of most of their younger colleagues, as those of Schoenberg and Stravinsky did in the Twenties.”

Kostelanetz establishes Carter’s professional reputation by drawing on a range of American composers and musical figures. He then compares Carter to other leading...
American composers. In doing so, Kostelanetz places Carter in a niche between many of the extremes represented by these other composers:

And that sophisticated and discriminating audience who finds Babbitt too difficult, Copland too easy, and Cage too trivial, generally acknowledges Carter as the greatest living American composer. Remarkably enough, his work represents a ground that is at once between the extremes and yet artistically avant-garde.101

After highlighting Carter’s reputation among other composers, and trying to determine his place within the ranks of his colleges, Kostelanetz points out that in their conversations Carter avoided discussing any contemporary composers by name, a common feature of Carter’s published interviews and much scholarship about Carter. Instead, Carter discussed general trends, describing serialism as “basically coarse, crude, and insensitive.”102 By avoiding comparisons with other composers, Kostelanetz presents Carter as an individualist and uniquely American figure, creating his own approach to avant-garde composition:

Although listeners can now discern how the Piano Sonata of 1945 fed into the excellences of his recent works, in looking back over his career we can also recognize how Carter made several courageous leaps above the conventional ways of composing to fashion a compositional style very much his own, yet today more widely admired and, in the highest kind of flattery, often imitated by younger American composers. The question of how Carter became a great composer deserves a profoundly American answer: he did it all by himself.103

By praising Carter as the individualist and “courageous” American hero, he helps to develop another important narrative the composer would cultivate throughout his career, which will be the basis of the next chapter.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 45.

103 Ibid.
While Carter tried to avoid publishing detailed public statements regarding his own music and trends around him, insisting that his music should speak for itself, organizers for the 1967 Minnesota lecture series sought to publish the lectures as a book. Preferring to compose rather than refine and edit the lectures, Carter settled on undergoing a series of interviews with Allen Edwards as the basis for the book, to cover many of the same topics in more detail and with more precision. In a letter to Carleton Gamer, Carter said that the careful revision process employed in *Flawed Words* made it the first time his thoughts and opinions had been accurately recorded.\(^\text{104}\) The book consists of three parts: the first covers differences between the United States and Europe, the second Carter’s development and biography, and the third technical issues.

Serialism appears tangentially in the first section as a part of Carter’s attempts to differentiate European and American composers. He positions Europeans as working systematically, presumably using serial techniques, while American composers value freedom, resulting in a sense of freshness:

On another level, American works are seldom the product of working methods characteristic of many important European composers, who have gone about their task in a systematic way, carefully coordinating musical means and ends at every level while weeding out initially accepted elements that did not contribute to their specific intentions. For often it seems that they must have formed a very clear idea of what they wished to accomplish, and were determined to pursue this down to the smallest details of their work. In my opinion, it is the very absence of this sharpness of focus and close coordination of means in terms of a very clarified musical intention that gives the good works of American music

their special freshness and makes the listener sense in them an esthetic point of view different from the more or less standard European one.  

Carter continues the trend mentioned by Kostelanetz of not discussing his contemporaries anywhere in the book. For example, when discussing the importance of the American spirit for artists, Carter turns to poets, Edgar Allen Poe and Walt Whitman instead of composers.  

In the third section of Flawed Words, discussing techniques, Carter highlights his writing for instruments as a defining characteristic of his style, derived from Salzman’s categorization of Carter leading the “new virtuosity” aesthetic. Carter, however, takes the idea much further than Salzman, deriving not just a loose community of composers sharing some general concerns, but an entirely new approach to the organization and development of music histories. Carter describes composers during the Baroque era as composing in the abstract or at a keyboard and then transcribing music from the keyboard to various instruments. He suggested Classical and Romantic era composers overcame this problem by beginning to consider the characteristics of specific instruments. However, the problem returned in the first half of the twentieth century with composers such as Stravinsky and Copland, both of whom composed primarily at the piano. Serial composers went even further, creating what Carter called a “uniform canon” of musical sonority and behavior to which instruments would then be made to conform.”  

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105 Edwards, Flawed Words, 30. I will discuss the implications of his description of Americanism in the third chapter dealing with Carter’s construction of an American identity.

106 In a 1969 letter to Effie Carlson, answering questions related to her dissertation on twelve-tone composition, Carter discusses how he thinks that the best composers make the techniques, specifically row material here, sink to a “second, third, or even fourth level of importance.” He then lists composers he feels do this effectively, crossing continental boundaries: Stravinsky, Dallapiccola, Petrassi, and Sessions.

107 Edwards, Flawed Words, 68.
redefined the essential characteristics of these compositional styles. In his historical analysis, sonority and timbre took on primary importance while other musical characteristics such as pitch, rhythm, and dynamics became secondary. Thus, he saw the primary achievements of nineteenth-century composers and challenge for twentieth-century composers in terms of instrumentation. By positioning himself within a long development of composers struggling with the relationship of compositions in the abstract to the instruments which play the parts, he becomes both a radical and a historically grounded composer, reclaiming and building on the nineteenth-century traditions that appealed to broad audiences.

After a brief discussion of instrumentation in his own works, Carter and Edwards return to serialism, with Edwards asking about recent attempts to “rationalize” post-tonal composition. Edwards establishes Carter’s anti-serialism through his question: “In writing your own works you have conspicuously avoided fealty to any of the various systems, particularly the serial system, that have purported to provide a rational basis and method for coming to terms with the linguistic problems of post-tonal music.” This wording frames serialism as scientific rather than musical, and Carter responds by talking about the two primary characteristics he looks for in music, communication and “musical sense.” Carter does not specifically define the term musical sense, but presumably in this context he views it as a form of coherence that connects sections of a work to each other. He explains that serialism merely provides a framework within which a composition may

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108 See Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1974), 94-95. Cone quotes from this section of *Flawed Words* to compare Carter’s new conception of the intrinsic characters of instruments to Berlioz, however he does not attempt to construct a history in the terms Carter envisions here, only drawing a line from Berlioz to Carter.

be considered coherent, meaning that it is limited to this second and less important characteristic of “musical sense.” According to Carter, the rational structures provided by serialism should be used “only to achieve the desired communication, which must therefore in every case be the prime and ultimate determinant of any musical system pretending to genuine musical rationality [emphasis original].” Because serial systems do not assist the composer’s desire to communicate they “are often useless for musical purposes.”

By making such a statement, Carter seems to be opening a window for audiences who may be skeptical of the sound of his compositions, arguing that even if initially his compositions sound as dense and unintelligible as serial works, with enough hearings listeners will begin to recognize that Carter’s compositions are different and are capable of communication much like works by masters of previous eras.

Carter justifies his own use of mathematical properties in compositions by claiming they are related to order as perceived by the listener, as opposed to the order dictated by serial procedures, which listeners may find imperceptible:

It’s obvious that the real order and meaning of music is the one the listener hears with his ears. Whatever occult mathematical orders may exist on paper are not necessarily relevant to this in the least. Now it’s true that in writing my own works I sometimes try quasi-“geometric” things in order to cut myself off from habitual ways of thinking about particular technical problems and to place myself in, so to speak, new terrain, which forces me to look around and find new kinds of ideas and solutions I might not have thought of otherwise. Nonetheless, if what I come up with by these methods is unsatisfactory from the point of view of what I think is interesting to hear, I throw it out without a second thought.

When discussing Nono’s approach to serialism in his 1963 lectures, Carter explained that there were elements Nono controlled and accounted for with his ear that enabled the work

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110 Ibid., 80.

111 Ibid., 80-81.
to be successful. In presenting Nono’s composition as derived from his listening to and then manipulating the results of serial procedures, Carter created a parallel with his discussion of his own music at the time, even if Nono relied much more heavily on systems than Carter, it was a difference of degree. In *Flawed Words*, Carter does away with specific examples from music, instead speaking abstractly about serialism, as merely finding a formula, plugging in numbers and watching a piece come out as a result. Now, trying to distance himself from serial composition Carter reframes serial techniques in the same terms as its harshest critics, removing the individuality and communicative properties he so highly valued only a few years earlier. Carter then repositions his own use of methods related to serialism as a means of exploring “new terrain,” and breaking his normal habits and practices.

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Carter’s more extreme break with serialism and twelve-tone composition came over a decade later with the response to David Schiff’s *The Music of Elliott Carter*. Schiff analyzed Carter’s compositions using the terms Carter himself had developed, in a manner he hoped would be accessible to both theorists and the public who were buying recordings of his works. Carter and Schiff had already struggled with their attempts to appeal to this vaguely defined record buying public when they found no American publishers willing to take up the project.\(^{112}\) Upon release in England, the American music theory establishment responded by praising the work for its scope and breadth, but

\(^{112}\) Carter discussed his struggles relating to attempts to find an American publisher detailed in his correspondence with William Glock (located in the Elliott Carter Collection of the Paul Sacher Stiftung), who initiated the project in England through Eulenberg Books. The book was not published in America until the second edition, after it had already been translated and updated for publication in Italy.
criticized Schiff’s analytical methods, which did not align with the systematic approaches to discussing atonal pitch structures that had developed over the previous decades.

Carter viewed Andrew Mead’s review for *Notes* as representative of the response of the American music theory establishment. Mead begins by stating that the book “may serve as a general introduction to the composer and his music for the interested concert-goer.” However, he then details problems with the book’s lack of clear and definitive terminology, such as the use of the word “chord” to refer to “collections distinguished by pitch-class content, and collections which can only be distinguished by pitch-class order.” Schiff specifically suggests that chord labeling should have followed Allen Forte’s format from *The Structure of Atonal Music*, rather than Carter’s own methods, as doing so requires the reader to translate between the two. On a more fundamental level, Mead challenges the individuality Carter had cultivated throughout his writings:

Schiff’s frequent comparison of Carter’s music with other music suffers from a similar lack of demonstrated understanding of the deeper aspects of musical structure. The excerpts he offers as examples of Carter’s ‘originality’ have considerable precedent in the music of Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Schoenberg, and Reger. This reviewer is not calling Carter’s originality into question; it is precisely his individuality which draws one to his music, but an understanding of the dialectic involved in this kind of question requires far more penetrating analysis than is offered in Schiff’s book.

When read in conjunction with the demand that analysis make use of Forte’s language devised primarily for the analysis of twelve-tone or serial compositions, Carter

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interpreted the review as a demand from theorists that his compositions be examined as twelve-tone works.

The experience of this review and the “demand” that Carter be a twelve-tone composer remained central to Carter’s continuing relationship with serialism. In a 1993 letter to Felix Meyer, regarding the *Harmony Book*, Carter expressed his continued frustration, nearly ten years later, with the reviews of Schiff’s book:

As for Raffaele Pozzi’s plan to work on the development of my ‘Harmony Book’ I do not remember what ‘editions’ or sketches of it are in the Stiftung – all I know is that I have here the final edition (I guess) made in 1987, a Xerox of which I have sent Pozzi so he can get to understand the organization of the book before he comes to Basel (if he does) I no longer use the book as I did – a matter I explained to Pozzi, showing him how I proceed at present. All of this, of course, was worked out by me in comparative isolation as I needed the information for one composition or another. Now the 12-tone circuit in American Universities is condemning David Schiff’s book and myself for not proclaiming that I am a 12-tone composer. What I do is, of course, very different from the Schoenberg methods… and I do not always use the entire 12 notes before I go on to the next section!116

After his numerous attempts to claim that no such thing as strict twelve-tone composition existed, and that he was one of many composers at the time who composed works making use of the entire chromatic collection, these experiences led Carter to deny any connection between his own processes and twelve-tone composition. Thus he became known to younger composers such as Steven Mackey as “provocatively anti-serial.”117

Whether we consider Carter a twelve-tone composer or a composer within a larger twelve-tone/serial enterprise, he frequently defined his own identity in relation to

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117 Mackey, “A Matter of Taste.”
the compositional world around him with careful consideration of twelve-tone or serial methods. Through examining Carter’s developing persona, we see that the problem with defining a twelve-tone or serial tyranny is that many composers themselves did not clearly define these terms, nor did they fully grasp the compositional methods developed and used by their peers. For those who saw themselves outside the serial tyranny, Carter represented the serial establishment as one of the most publicly successful composers of the generation both in America and abroad. For Carter, however, who attempted to cultivate his own position as an individualist composer, the same establishment became a system which he was forced to define himself against as it became a dominant trend rather than a phase in young composers’ development. In the next chapter I will explore Carter’s cultivation of a distinctly American individualist identity during this timeframe.
Chapter 3: The Construction and Dissemination of an American Identity

Throughout his career Elliott Carter embraced an identity as a specifically American composer. However, he found his music performed more frequently in Europe than the United States, and he often took antagonistic positions with American audiences, performers, institutions, and government agencies. He regularly and publicly aired his grievances over the treatment of composers in America and spent years living abroad even in the middle of what both David Schiff and James Wierzbicki call his “American period.”¹ The twisting line Carter managed to walk in his troubled relationship with his identification as an American composer has a long history in American narratives. For Carter, the struggle with his nation allowed him to tap into popular narratives about the American Dream and individualism that allowed talented individuals to rise up amidst struggles, while ignoring his privileged upbringing, education, and inheritance.²

While crafting his public persona in the mold of the independent American hero in opposition to society, Carter took great care in his interactions with the government. He saw the development of cultural diplomacy programs during the Cold War as opening new avenues to further his career. He approached the combination of composing,

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lecturing, touring, and arranging concerts for governmental diplomacy efforts with a keen business sense, measuring the value of participation in government-sponsored and non-governmental programs through new audiences and performances against the time participation took away from composing. He even went so far as to attempt to negotiate more favorable artistic conditions in the United States in exchange for his participation in cultural diplomacy efforts. Aware of the power of cultural propaganda, Carter initiated discussions with the government as often as officials approached him. In this regard, Carter differs from many of his contemporaries. Such composers have been portrayed as driven by viewing participation as a civic duty, agreeing with the aims of cultural diplomacy, or needing to accept any opportunity to advance their career. Carter at times had all of these feelings, but he also frequently felt that the government’s offers clashed with his own vision for the direction of his career, causing him to refuse official opportunities and create his own diplomatic missions. In this chapter I trace Carter’s evolving construction of an individualist American identity and his attempts to navigate the economy of Cold War cultural diplomacy as he constructed a career as an American composer.

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3 Carter composed best when he was given long periods of time with no other responsibilities, causing him to work most efficiently when away from New York.

4 Sometimes this even caused trouble. For example, upon learning he won the Siemens prize, Carter wrote almost immediately to government officials, only to learn that they then contacted the award committee, who were upset because they had not yet made the public declaration. This exchange takes place in his correspondence with Siegfried Janzen and Daryl Dayton, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

Other Composers Active in Cultural Diplomacy

Nicholas Nabokov, one of Carter’s closest friends, represents one side of cultural diplomacy efforts, participating for almost purely ideological reasons. Nabokov mostly gave up on his compositional career to pursue a role as an “extra-governmental” diplomat/propagandist/impresario, driven by staunch anti-Soviet sentiments. Nabokov, a Russian émigré, first moved to Berlin and then America in 1933. He entered government circles at the end of the Second World War, returning to Berlin in 1945 under the auspices of the military to work on psychological and cultural warfare. Assigned to the music section, Nabokov was expected to “cleanse” German musical life of Nazis by controlling concert programs. After the war, Nabokov took an active role in fighting communism. At the 1949 Waldorf Astoria Conference he publicly confronted Shostakovich by asking if the composer agreed with the Soviet prohibition of the music of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Hindemith. In 1950 Nabokov took a leadership role in the development of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) alongside Michael Josselson, a former member of the Army’s Psychological Warfare Division, whom Nabokov had met in Berlin after the war. The CCF became one of the most powerful players in the cultural Cold War, sponsoring large festivals and journals throughout Europe and the world with the help of money from the CIA, a secret sponsorship of

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which Nabokov denied knowledge.\(^8\) Whether Nabokov knew that the CIA was providing the funding for the CCF or not, he was motivated first and foremost by his interest in fighting against the spread of communism, and he mostly gave up his compositional career to participate in this struggle.\(^9\)

Aaron Copland, another of Carter’s close friends, also took part in cultural diplomacy efforts based on his political convictions, but unlike Nabokov, Copland saw cultural diplomacy as a path to peace, speaking critically of United States policy at the Waldorf-Astoria Conference.\(^10\) Studying Copland’s participation in American cultural diplomacy efforts, Emily Abrams Ansari argues that he viewed politics on an international level and therefore was “far less interested in questioning the limits of capitalism than he was in building communication \textit{between} different political systems and in finding ways to contribute, through his music and his actions, to better international relations.”\(^11\) Throughout his career, Copland was “an engaged citizen,” and his works express this concern for political issues.\(^12\) For Copland, therefore, the mere act of composing, and disseminating his own compositions and those of others, worked


\(^9\) Carter continued to believe that Nabokov was a good composer and frequently tried to support Nabokov’s compositional career through encouraging the study of his music and recommending him for residencies. Carter praised Nabokov’s \textit{Rasputin’s End} in a published review. See Elliott Carter, “Current Chronicle: Germany” \textit{Musical Quarterly} 46, no. 3 (July 1960): 367-71. Reprinted in \textit{CEL} as “Rasputin’s End and Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk.”

\(^10\) See David Caute, \textit{The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 393.

\(^11\) Ansari, 127.

towards a vision of peace.\textsuperscript{13} Copland expressed these ideas publicly in his speech at the Waldorf Hotel: “All of us are aware of how powerful an agent art can be in giving all humanity a sense of togetherness. How unfortunate it is that our lawmakers have so little conception of the way in which the work of our composers, painters, and writers might be used in order to draw closer bonds between our own people and those of other nations.”\textsuperscript{14}

Copland serves as a particularly interesting comparison with Carter because they both studied with Boulanger and were close friends before the war began. Carter shared Copland’s vision of music as a medium based on communication between composer, performer, and audience. Carter, however, was less idealistic with regard to the power of this musical communication. While Copland felt musical communication could influence society at large, Carter saw it limited to a more personal level. As I proposed in my reading of the first movement of the Cello Sonata, Carter’s compositions often focused on this idea of personal interaction, juxtaposing individual characters. We see this contrast in their approaches to the 1960 tour of the Soviet Union. Copland wanted American works played in the Soviet Union because he thought they would lead to mutual understanding between nations: “I had the illusion that by demonstrating relations are possible on a cultural plane we might encourage talks on the diplomatic plane.” Carter’s primary interest in having his works performed abroad was the possibility of expanding his audience.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of Copland’s vision of music as a means of communication see Jennifer L. DeLapp, “Copland in the Fifties: Music and Ideology in the McCarthy Era,” Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 1997.


\textsuperscript{15} Ansari, 139. The quote originates from handwritten notes by Copland, which were transcribed by Ansari.
Ansari’s discussion of Virgil Thomson forms another distinct point on the spectrum of why composers participated in these programs due to Thomson’s claim to be “apolitical” throughout his career. Thomson took pride in his rejection of politics. He publicly stated that he never voted and spoke out against political compositions. For Thomson the government served simply as an arts patron. Thomson viewed the government as another arts organization, allowing him to justify in his mind taking an active role in government activities, serving on numerous committees, and traveling around the world as a representative. Through his interactions with the government, Thomson expanded the audience for his own compositions, and his role as a music critic. By directing international programming, Thomson served as a tastemaker on a far larger scope than possible through his published writings and reviews. The idea of treating government institutions as another type of patron aligns most closely with Carter’s approach to cultural diplomacy. However, Carter was by no means apolitical. He generally avoided explicitly mixing political messages with his music, but he recognized that as an artist he could play an important role in international diplomacy efforts, and maintained an interest in using these opportunities to promote himself and other American composers whenever possible.

For Carter the government served as a unique patron with an inordinate amount of power over American musical life. In part, the government had the potential to provide composers with second and third performances of new works, an opportunity not provided by more commercial institutions, which were interested primarily in premieres. Carter often found orchestras and ensembles willing to commission large works provided that they could have first performance rights, and sometimes exclusive rights that would
extend for a year or longer after this initial performance. After the first performance, however, large works tended to be lost. Orchestras often catered to audiences with little interest in these compositions, and the performances required significantly more rehearsal time, meaning that without the ability to fundraise and promote a performance as a special premiere event many orchestras were not interested. Chamber ensembles and soloists differed in this regard, often touring with an established repertoire. When an ensemble chose to learn one of Carter’s quartets, for example, they spent significant time rehearsing and then performed it in numerous venues on tours.\textsuperscript{16} Government patronage offered similar opportunities. When the government sent an orchestra abroad it would function much like a chamber ensemble, touring with a set repertoire that would be repeated in numerous cities. Additionally, the government was not interested in commissioning new works, but rather in finding the best examples of existing works by American composers.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, inclusion of these works in an overseas tour would most likely result in their addition to domestic concerts during the regular season. Taking a business-like approach to self-promotion, Carter was always conscious of the challenges the American system presented to composers and to successful dissemination of new compositions.

In the immediate postwar era composers were presented with a dilemma. American audiences had become receptive to new music with the spread of patriotism

\textsuperscript{16} Recordings also cost significantly less for chamber groups than orchestras, and they became increasingly important for dissemination.

\textsuperscript{17} See Emily Abrams Ansari, “Shaping the Policies of Cold War Musical Diplomacy: An Epistemic Community of American Composers” \textit{Diplomatic History} 30, no. 1 (January 2012): 50-51. Ansari points out the government officials such as Julius Seebach were often critical of the emphasis placed on American compositions because they were “not good enough,” meaning that they had the potential to diminish the United States global reputation.
and wartime compositions, but, as discussed in Chapter One, European critics warned against this spread of American nationalism. Carter’s constructed public persona managed to balance these issues, much like his negotiation of the boundary of serial methods discussed in Chapter Two. On the one hand, Carter’s criticism of American cultural institutions appealed to European fears of American power and nationalism. On the other hand, Carter used these same criticisms of American cultural institutions to position himself as a proudly American composer at home, celebrating tropes of freedom and individualism. We can examine Carter’s efforts to adopt such a nuanced identity as an American composer through the mythology surrounding the compositions of the First String Quartet. In the most frequently repeated version of the quartet’s, and by extension the composer’s, origin myth Carter described a rejection of all types of American institutions in his interview with Allen Edwards:

Well, I worked up to one crucial experience, my First String Quartet, written around 1950, in which I decided for once to write a work very interesting to myself, and to say to hell with the public and with the performers too. I wanted to write a work that carried out completely the various ideas I had at that time about the form of music, about texture and harmony – about everything. This work became very much admired, which was quite unexpected because I didn’t write it deliberately ‘so that it would be unplayable’; I wrote it always with the idea of practical performance in mind, but from my experience it was beyond any practical performance that I had ever aimed at before.18

While Carter’s narrative regarding the composition of the quartet in the deserts of Arizona and rejection of audiences, performers, and other institutions has been repeated ad infinitum, the development of this narrative, prior to the 1970s, has yet to be examined critically.

Construction of an American Identity – The Composition of the First String Quartet

The First Quartet has often been presented as the culmination of Carter’s compositional experiments in the postwar years. Due to his teaching and other professional responsibilities Carter felt that he lacked sufficient time to develop his many ideas while living in New York. Thus a grand work, such as the quartet, was only achievable through the self-imposed isolation he found using a Fulbright award, which allowed him to escape everyday life of the city. Carter developed the basic outline of this story over the following decades in numerous stages before its clearest articulation above in the interview with Edwards. As I discussed in Chapter One, Carter began to explore the idea of organizing a composition around the interaction between two contrasting characters in the first movement of the Cello Sonata. In this movement each instrument functioned as an independent character, providing a non-serial approach to atonal composition. However, the remainder of the sonata is not particularly radical.  

During the years between having written the Cello Sonata and First Quartet, Carter taught composition and began to refine and develop ideas from the Cello Sonata and the earlier Piano Sonata in his pieces for timpani and the Eight Etudes and a Fantasy for woodwind quartet, neither of which was composed with publication in mind. Throughout his career, Carter found himself unable to compose large works while also teaching. At first he wrote his large pieces during years on leave, including the Fulbright award for the

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19 Wierzbicki discusses the debates concerning when Carter’s “new style” began and points out the fact that only these small sections of the Cello Sonata are truly representative of later works.

20 The timpani works were distributed to performers who expressed interest. They were not published until the 1960s. The woodwind etudes began as a teaching tool to explore the sonic possibilities of the ensemble, and upon taking them home Carter decided to work out a fantasy that would combine ideas from each of the etudes.
First Quartet, and later he chose to avoid full-time teaching responsibilities in favor of spending more time composing. The value of Carter’s trip to the desert lay not in the seeming isolation, but in freeing him from the other demands of professional life, including both teaching and participation in professional organizations. Even in this apparently remote location Carter was not intellectually alone. He was accompanied by his wife and son, and while there he developed a close friendship with the naturist Joseph Krutch, who was working on a book about the region.

This self-mythology as it has persisted since the Edwards interview draws life from the idea that Carter rejected performers and audiences with the composition, with writers frequently quoting Carter’s “to hell.” In fact, he did the opposite and worked hard to reach out to performers, believing that he had composed a work which would find great success. He sent copies of the score to multiple quartets, hopeful that he could interest a group in learning and performing it. Furthermore, as we see in his

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21 We can see that throughout his career Carter finished works primarily during periods such as this, with the Variations composed during his stay in Rome, the Piano Concerto during his stay in Berlin, etc. While teaching at Juilliard, Carter avoided classroom responsibilities and took only a small number of students at a time so he would not need to spend any time teaching on most days.

22 Carter served on the board of both the League of Composers and the ISCM, as seen in the letter to William Glock discussed in the previous chapter.

23 Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Desert Year* (New York: Sloane, 1952). As a scholar of literature and theater, Krutch probably engaged in artistic conversations with Carter in addition to their discussions of nature.

24 Schiff included the quotation in his book, and it has become closely associated with Carter and the first quartet. Examples of it being reprinted can be found in the official program notes by Schirmer about the Symphony No. 1, a work written before and in a different style (Susan Feder, “Programme Note: Elliott Carter Symphony No. 1,” *G. Schirmer Music*, 1982, http://www.schirmer.com/default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=26723). The quotation may also be found in reviews of recordings of Carter’s music on Amazon.com (see dysfunctional-harmony, “Review of Elliott Carter: A Nonesuch Retrospective [Audio CD]” *Amazon.com*, November 25, 2011 http://www.amazon.com/Elliott-Carter-Nonesuch-Retrospective/product-reviews/B001FZCZF). This user actually changes the quotation slightly saying the quartet “was a work Carter almost explicitly wrote out of spite, quite literally saying, ‘To hell with the populace!’”
correspondence with John Garvey of the Walden Quartet, Carter offered to help with the learning process and even offered to make revisions if necessary:

Thanks for your letter. I am sending you a set of parts for my quartet. You will find that there are a few changes of detail in chords and accidental which I have made since I gave you the score. The parts I imagine, therefore, are more correct than your score. But all the rhythmic problems still are the same and they are a great stumbling block, I am sure. But I think that if you get the hang of them your quartet will not have a great deal of difficulty with the work. I have also considerable doubts about some of my bowing indications but I think those can be easily straightened out once the work is understood by the performers. I have made a few remarks in the parts in the hope that they may help you to read the piece.

Carter continued the letter by discussing performance opportunities, hoping to convince the Walden Quartet to invite performers familiar with his Piano Sonata to take part in their concert at the University of Illinois. Then he suggested that he would use his own connections to arrange a concert for them in New York:

I am overjoyed at the idea that you still want to have an evening of my music at the university next year. I do not know just what you will have on the program. You might think about the quartet, if you do not want to get Webster Aitken or B. Webster to play the piano sonata.

I really do not know yet anything about the concert season for next year. Both the ISCM and the League are very vague always until the opening of each season, but I will see what I can do in the very near future.25

Part of Carter’s success throughout his career was in his ability to develop lasting relationships with performers, and here we see Carter attempting to arrange for performers of the piano sonata to travel to Illinois and promising to attempt to bring the Walden Quartet to New York.

By the middle of 1952, Carter learned that the Walden Quartet did not find the piece especially troublesome to learn, but the only performance he was able to arrange in

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New York would take place at Columbia University. He explained in a letter that despite the premiere taking place in the University concert series he would try to ensure that critics attended the performance. Furthermore, he would arrange for a recording to be made if the quartet was interested:

I have just received an announcement from Columbia University that the Walden Quartet is giving the world premiered of my quartet on Feb. 26. I am delighted indeed and wish to thank you for attacking my difficult work so bravely.

Do you think that your quartet would be interested in making a commercial record of the work at that time? Or would you rather wait? I am quite sure that I can arrange this as there is a recording fund at the ACA. Likewise there is some question of Columbia Records doing some music of mine on the chamber music series and perhaps this tie up could be made.

I will do what I can to get a reasonable critic to come to this concert, but, as you realise this particular series is seldom covered by the press.

As we see in preparations for the quartet’s premiere, Carter did not reject performers and audiences; he tried to use all aspects of the traditional apparatus available to him, including his connections at Columbia University, with the ISCM, LOC, ACA, and the press to ensure the widest possible dissemination of his quartet.

Carter’s efforts to disseminate the quartet as widely as possible continued during his fellowship at the American Academy in Rome in 1953-54, another period away from New York so he could dedicate himself to composition, now writing the Variations for Orchestra. Shortly after arriving in Rome Carter learned that the quartet won first prize in a competition sponsored by the city of Liège, which would guarantee a premiere.

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26 Carter also apparently sent a copy of the score to the LaSalle Quartet. A letter dated December 15, 1952 from Walter Levin explains that they lack sufficient time to prepare the quartet for their upcoming Spring tour, but may try in the future.

27 Elliott Carter to John Garvey, October 10, 1952, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
performance in addition to publication arrangements. He had already found both of these in America, through the Walden’s performance at Columbia University and a publication contract with American Music Publishers (AMP). But the prestige of a major European award and performances held great appeal as a means of self-promotion, so he fought to ensure he could win the prize despite his rather clear ineligibility. He turned to a variety of sources for help, his publisher Richard French, Harold Spivacke of the Library of Congress, Olga Koussevitzky (the competition was sponsored by the Koussevitzky Foundation), and Nicholas Nabokov, a friend and director of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. In examining Carter’s efforts to negotiate with the Liège committee through his correspondence, we see that he was adept at navigating the legalese of the competition rules, and he attempted to make use of his diplomatic connections by asking Nabokov for assistance.

Carter learned that he won the competition in a letter dated September 29, 1953 and immediately began to fear that he would be deemed ineligible. The contest rules stated the work must be an unknown and unpublished manuscript, but the work had already received multiple performances and was under contract for publication. Before writing back to the prize committee Carter sought advice from Richard French of AMP.\(^{28}\) French responded that he did not have the original rules, but if the publication and premiere were requirements and not merely rewards Carter had disqualified himself. However, if possible he assured Carter that if possible AMP would be happy to collaborate with the city on the publication of the work.\(^{29}\)

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\(^{28}\) Carter signed the publishing deal with AMP in May.

\(^{29}\) Richard French to Elliott Carter October 7, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. This letter references a letter from Carter to French on September 30, 1953, which does not survive.
Carter began to see the auxiliary benefits of winning a European prize almost immediately. In a letter dated October 1, only two days after Carter learned he had won the competition, Harold Spivacke of the Library of Congress sent a note to congratulate him. He also suggested mounting a performance of the Quartet in Washington, DC, and offered to take the work’s manuscript into the Library of Congress collection. Spivacke’s letter exemplifies the problematic position of many American composers. They were told that America would become a new cultural leader, but government officials only became interested in promoting American works after their value had been established in Europe. This difficult position explains why Carter fought so hard to ensure that he could find a compromise to keep the award, and even after learning he was ineligible continued to declare that the piece had won. As we see in Spivacke’s later letter (Carter’s letter to Spivacke does not survive), Carter had assumed that if he were ultimately deemed ineligible Spivacke would lose interest:

I was really surprised to read your letter of December 7. I had already heard about your difficulty at Liège but this was not what surprised me. I refer of course to your assumption that I would lose interest in your work. After all a group of fellows sat around and decided that it was a good work and we are therefore anxious to hear it. I remember you saying that the Waldens know it but in case it does not prove feasible for us to get hold of a score and parts for performance by some other group?  

Even while assuring Carter that the award was no longer necessary for his interest, he repeated that winning over the panel, of presumably European experts, was of primary importance. In the months between Spivacke’s initial interest and his reassurance that this

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30 Harold Spivacke to Elliott Carter, December 21, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. Spivacke had already arranged for the commission of the Sonata for Two Pianos in August of that year (also through the Koussevitzky foundation).
interest would continue in spite of Carter’s ineligibility, we find letters reflecting Carter’s panicked attempts to ensure he could accept the prize.

Carter waited almost a month to respond to Lecomte’s letter about winning the prize. In writing, Carter tried to outline his interpretation of the rules in which his previous performances would not disqualify him. He argued that the performances at Universities (Columbia and Illinois), which took place before submission to the competition, should be considered private performances and therefore not premieres. The public performances in New York and California only took place after submission.

I have received no word from you since you sent me the telegram informing me that I was to receive the first prize in the String Quartet Competition, concluded on September 29. During that time I have found a copy of the regulations of the competition and would like to discuss them with you.

In submitting the quartet, I felt that I was conforming to Article 3 – ‘The work should be a manuscript, unpublished and unknown to the public.’ For although the work had been performed twice in the United States up to that time, it was played in both cases before University audiences, once at Columbia University and once at the University of Illinois in what could be called private performances. Since submitting the score on April 30, 1953, it was performed at an ISCM concert in New York and at a Festival in California, always by the Walden Quartet. If, in your opinion, this disqualifies the work, I shall be ready to abide by your decision.

Recognizing the value of premieres, Carter continued by providing an opportunity for them to perform an alternate in its place, which could be justified by his quartet’s difficulty:

As for ‘Article II. – The work ranking first will be imposed at the competition for “Quartet Performance” in 1955.’ I realize that this work is of excessive difficulty I know that it took the Walden Quartet many months to learn the work and that, from the article in the ‘London Times’, your quartet needed a conductor which does not surprise me. For this reason, I should be inclined to be lenient in this demand and possibly make the work an alternate one with some other one.
Next, he addressed publication issues, declaring that Richard French and AMP would be happy to arrange for a joint publication:

As for ‘Article 12 b – The City of Liège will publish the first prize work in 300 copies; c) the winner of the first prize work will receive 50 complimentary copies of the published work.’ Some months after submitting the quartet to your contest, I signed a contract with [Associated Music Publishers]… For the publication of the quartet. I have written Mr. Richard F. French of that concern to ask him what he would advise doing and he thought that an agreement between the City of Liège and Associated could easily be worked out…

Finally, Carter turned to exclusive performance rights promised to the Liège quartet, proposing they maintain European rights while the Walden Quartet continue to perform it in the United States.

As for “Article 13 – The “Quatuor Municipale de Liège alone will be authorized to perform the work awarded the first prize until the date of publication.” Would you be willing to amend this to exclude the United States, since the Walden Quartet have several engagements to perform the work this winter in the USA? In any case, I would appreciate your letting me know the publication date, as well as your answers to all these matters at your very earliest convenience.  

Carter effectively had nothing to gain from the competition after making these concessions, except perhaps performances in Europe by the Liège quartet, who apparently had incredible difficulty performing the work in the first place. However, even this was not guaranteed because he was willing to give up the performance at the next competition. All he would retain is the recognition of having won the award, which was the most important part for Carter, as he sought to appeal to American audiences and organizations.

While the response from Lecomte does not survive, apparently he did not approve of Carter’s explanations and proposals for accommodating the prizes, so Carter turned to

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31 Elliott Carter to Lecomte, October 21, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
Nabokov. Nabokov’s Congress for Cultural Freedom was beginning to establish itself as an important institution in postwar European cultural life, giving Carter hope that he could exert some pressure with the committee. Nabokov wrote in French to Louis Poulet on behalf of Carter, hoping to sway their decision by offering the Liège quartet engagements in CCF concerts:

In the next few days you will probably receive a letter from Radiodiffusion Italy to ask you about the possibility of the Quatuor Municipal de Liège’s participation in the performances we are organizing in Rome in April 1954.

For my part, I am writing to let you know about the performances that I am responsible for organizing (a job entrusted to me by the three principal organizations that are collaborating on these performances—the Centre Européen de la culture, the Congrès pour la Liberté de la Culture and Radiodiffusion Italy).

To give you an idea of what we are preparing, I am attaching a memorandum outlining the program for the International Conference of Composers, Music Critics, and Performers, as well as the International Composition Competition, which will take place in Rome between 4 and 15 April 1954.

We would like to have the Quatuor Municipal de Liège participate in the concerts, which will take place during the Conference. They will be funded by R.A.I., but the programs will be selected by the executive committee for performances.

We would like them to play Elliott Carter’s quartet, which won first prize at the Concours de Liège, and to which my friend Paul Collaer tells me, the Quatuor Municipal de Liège has exclusive rights. We have included this quartet on the program for 4 April, but of course we can change the date according to the quartet’s availability.

If the quartet could come to Rome, we would also like them to perform other quartets that we have put on the program for our Conference, including Copland’s piano quartet and perhaps one or two others. I will let you know which ones as soon as I receive your response.

I ask you to remember that our budget is very limited, and that the expenses taken on by the R.A.I. to produce the concerts for the conferences are already very high. We wonder if it would be possible for the Relations Culturelles of the Belgian government, or perhaps the city of Liège, to subsidize travel costs for the quartet to and from Rome.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Nicolas Nabokov to Louis Poulet, November 9, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. Translation mine, original text follows: “D’ici quelques jours vous recevrez probablement une lettre de la Radiodiffusion Itallienne, vous demandant les conditions d’une participation éventuelle du Quatuor Municipal de Liège aux manifestations musicales que nous organisons ici à Rome au mois d’avril 1954.”
By offering the Liège quartet a performance in the Rome festival, Nabokov could accomplish diplomatic goals, bringing representatives from another European country to the festival, while simultaneously promoting his friend’s career.\(^\text{33}\)

Despite these efforts, Carter was officially disqualified. However, through his negotiations and wide-ranging discussions he received a great deal of recognition and interest in the quartet, perhaps more than he would have if he had followed all of the rules and was limited by granting the Liège quartet exclusive performance rights for an extended timeframe. Even though Nabokov failed to convince the Liège quartet to perform the work in Rome, Carter’s quartet remained on the festival schedule which took place near the end of Carter’s stay in the city. Combined with Spivacke’s promise of a performance in Washington, Carter’s non-victory resulted in performances in two

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Moi de mon côté, je vous écris tout d’abord pour vous informer sur le caractère de ces manifestations l’ont j’ai la responsabilité d’organisateur (responsabilité qui m’a été confiée par les trois organismes principaux qui collaborent pour réaliser ces manifestations, c.à.d. le Centre Européen de la Culture, le Congrès pour la Liberté de la Culture et la Radiodiffusion Italienne).

Pour vous donner une idée de ce que nous préparons je vous joins un mémorandum, qui expose le plan général de la Conférence Internationale des compositeurs, critiques musicaux et interprètes, ainsi que du Concours International de Composition, qui se dérouleront à Rome entre le 4 et le 15 avril 1954.

Nous aimerions beaucoup avoir le concours du Quatuor Municipal de Liège dans le Programme des Concerts, qui auront lieu pendant la Conférence et dont la responsabilité financière est à la charge du R.A.I., mais dont les programmes sont décidé par le Comité Exécutif de manifestations.

Il s’agirait surtout de l’exécution du quatuor d’Elliott Carter, qui a gagné le prix au Concours de Liège et dont le Quatuor Municipal de Liège, comme me le dit mon ami Paul Collaer, a l’exclusivité. Nous avons inclus ce quatuor dans le programme du 4 avril, mais nous pourrions naturellement le changer de date selon les possibilités du Quatuor.

Si le Quatuor pouvait venir à Rome, nous aimerions qu’en plus de Carter il puisse présenter d’autres quatuors que nous avons mis aux programmes de notre Conférence, parmi lesquels se trouvant le Quatuor avec Pianoforte de Copland et peut-être 1 ou 2 autres dont je vous signalerai les noms aussitôt que j’aurai votre réponse.

Je vous prierai toutefois de tenir en considération le fait que notre budget est très limité et que les dépenses entreprises par le R.A.I. pour réaliser la partie “Concerts” de notre Conférence est déjà énorme. Nous demanderions donc s’il pouvait être envisagé une subvention de côté de Relations Culturelles du Gouvernement Belge ou bien de la municipalité de la ville de Liège, qui couvrirait les frais de voyage aller et retour du Quatuor de Liège à Rome.”

\(^{33}\) Nabokov also sent a letter to Paul Collaer, who was one of the judges in the competition, asking about the quartet and inviting Collaer to take part in the Rome festival.
important cities, including an important European center. Thus, he could return to the United States with significant European credentials in time for the forthcoming recording, which he continued to negotiate with the ACA and Walden Quartet.

**The First Quartet as an American Composition and the Roots of American Cultural Diplomacy**

If Carter’s first important lesson in the Liège experience concerned the value of European recognition for success in America, as seen in his correspondence with Spivacke, the second lesson dealt with musical nationalism. Carter discovered that listeners could hear his compositions as specifically American without the inclusion of elements from jazz or folk songs used by many of his colleagues. Robert Erich Wolff, an American studying musicology in Liège, wrote to Carter after attending the competition to praise the work and its “Americanness.”

> In utmost seriousness let me say that your quartet provided me with one of the few truly moving musical experiences I have had since coming to Europe a year ago. From its first bars I said “American”; it was a language, musical and personal, that “signified” for me, that communicated in a way that little I have heard here has done. Whatever divergences of specific technique exist between your compositional vocabulary and mine, the essence remains in common, and I am deeply grateful for the communication (which has probably paralyzed me creatively for another three weeks!). Living among Europeans who read the daily papers one has so few occasions to be proud of being American, a matter of small importance in itself but one which does blunt the daily attacks of my student friends. Thanks!

Wolff continued by describing his interactions with numerous artists in more detail, all of whom were interested in celebrating Carter’s and America’s victory:

> Most amusing: with the announcement of your victory and identity I was immediately surrounded by professors, students, musicians, modern dancers, and even music critics for an hour of vigorous hand-shaking and
champagne-toasting; I was The Voice of America plus The Voice of Elliott Carter… 34

By drawing attention to the Voice of America, one of the most prominent instruments of American cultural diplomacy, Wolff demonstrated to Carter that music could serve as an effective tool of cultural diplomacy even without the composer or American performers present.

In his depiction of the power of Carter’s victory, as transforming routine attacks on America from fellow students to hand-shaking and champagne-toasting, Wolff’s narrative exemplifies the aims and methods of the United States’ developing cultural diplomacy program for the Cold War. The community in Liège embraced not only Carter’s quartet, but also the nation as a whole. Carter’s cultural export initiated conversations about American society and culture. From the government’s perspective, the next step would be for Carter to visit Liège himself, where he could explain how the freedom of American society enabled him to write such an ambitious work. The government did offer Carter support for a year-long stay in Belgium to build on his success through the Fulbright program. Carter’s refusal to stay in Belgium resulted in the first of many revealing discussions concerning the differing visions of the goals and/or methods of cultural diplomacy between government officials and Carter. To understand the context of these discussions and how Carter’s expectations for successful cultural diplomacy differed from the government’s, I will briefly explore the origins and aims of these early cultural diplomacy efforts from the government’s perspective.

Immediately after the war ended, State Department officials tried to harness the potential of cultural propaganda in combating the Soviet Union and communism. The

34 Robert Erich Wolf to Elliott Carter, October 9, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
effects of such attempts are difficult to quantify, and Americans had a distaste for the concept of propaganda as anti-democratic. As such, early propaganda officials declared that they were dealing only with factual information and therefore not propaganda. These State Department officials, who wanted to convert Office of War Information infrastructure and strategy into a Cold War propaganda machine, faced steady opposition in Congress. In addition to the dislike of propaganda, many policymakers were skeptical of the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy and contemporary art. Officials were often accused of ties to communism, and Republican congressmen and senators eagerly slashed funding for these activities, pointing to examples from modern art and painting as wasteful spending that promoted communist sympathy and obscenity.  

When Eisenhower took over the presidency, he placed a new emphasis on conducting warfare through information and propaganda, becoming the first and only president to appoint a propaganda adviser to his cabinet. Despite such enthusiasm for information warfare from the president, Congress still vociferously opposed these activities. One of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s first targets as the chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations was the United States information establishment. In early 1953 he used testimony from former Voice of America (VOA) employees, and a series of engineering errors to single out the VOA as a source of waste, and a location where communist sympathizers were sabotaging government programs.  


initially cooperated with McCarthy, and instructed Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to fire numerous top officials and suspend projects. Dulles established a policy banning the International Information Agency (IIA) from using “materials by any Communists, fellow-travelers, et cetera” under any circumstances. The vague use of the term “et cetera” severely limited potential materials for use in overseas cultural diplomacy.  

McCarthy’s hearings and attempts to embarrass the VOA resulted in the creation of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953, designed by Eisenhower to oversee all information operations from the State Department. Concurrent with these internal fights about the direction of United States propaganda, the Soviet Union experienced its own problems, beginning with Stalin’s death in March of 1953. Stalin’s death appeared to provide a perfect opportunity for propaganda efforts to influence the Soviet public and future leaders. American officials initially hoped that propaganda coupled with Czech and East German protests could result in the fall of the Soviet Union from within. However, the August 12, 1953 hydrogen bomb tests by the Soviet Union, forced the United States to begin shifting its policy. Now facing an enemy nation with the power to destroy the United States, policy emphasis turned from a forceful disintegration of the Soviet Union to seeking a peaceful co-existence, which placed greater emphasis on the potential value of cultural diplomacy efforts.

Wolff’s depiction of the Liégeois interest in learning more about life in the United States after hearing Carter’s quartet aligned with attempts in the early 1950s to counter Soviet depictions of America as “a nation of semibarbarian materialists ill-suited for

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political leadership.” Arthur Goodfriend’s 1953 book *My America* is exemplary of these efforts, based on a combination of his State Department sponsored travel throughout the world and his participation in the American Round Table. In his efforts to define the essential characteristics of the nation Goodfriend stressed the lack of class stratification and education opportunities. When combined with a high value placed on personal liberty, Goodfriend argued that American society enabled anyone to succeed in any area they chose. Goodfriend also stressed the ability of American citizens to criticize their government, praising the accessibility of books critical of America society and industries. As an example, he points out that Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, critical of corruption in the meatpacking industry, was widely available in public libraries. Goodfriend quotes Wriston from the panel discussion: “Those who are most deeply committed to the American system are most critical of it; they are filled with ‘a divine discontent.’” Goodfriend then goes on to describe how newspapers would simultaneously tear down America for its many faults while building it up by encouraging citizens to take an active role in reforming the nation and fixing its problems.

Carter embraced the idea that Americans should critique their government in his discussions concerning public diplomacy, feeling that as an active international composer he had an understanding of how cultural outreach programs could be most effective. However, examining Carter’s correspondence it is often unclear whether these

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38 Belmonte, 65.


recommendations were made primarily to benefit diplomacy efforts or Carter’s career. Furthermore, when his ideas were not adopted he often became frustrated and refused to participate in any program. Carter’s first debates with the government over diplomacy efforts came at the end of his stay in Rome. Despite initial misgivings about going to Rome at all, preferring to find a teaching position in the United States, his success and compositional productivity in Europe inspired Carter to seek a means of staying for a second year. He initially outlined his plans in an application in late July of 1953, prior to his success in Belgium, seeking to build on his position with the ISCM through lecturing in Europe.

1) Lectures on the development of contemporary music in the United States with illustrations on recordings. These lectures will be primarily for musicians and musical people and will deal not only with the various American composers but with the receptivity in America to American music and contemporary music in general. Also I would discuss the role of the various organizations such as the League of Composers and the ISCM with which I have been associated in promoting these efforts.

2) The stimulation of performances of American music in Italy since, as a former president of the US section of the ISCM I am in contact with most contemporary composers in Italy as well as performers of this music I shall be able to indicate to them works which would be of interest to them.

3) To further the liaison between the United States and Italy in this field by becoming thoroughly familiar with Italian works of contemporary music and, on my return, as well as during my stay to bring these works to the attention of program committees or various organizations in America concerned with performing new music.41

Carter presented his planned use of the award in the terms of cultural diplomacy. First he would discuss American music, culture, and society with audiences through lectures. Second he would promote performances of American works in Italy, serving as a curator by choosing the best pieces to make a positive impression on foreign audiences. Finally,

41 Elliott Carter to Francis A. Young, July 31, 1953, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
he would bring Italian music back to America, creating an international exchange, which would cause relationships to continue long after his fellowship period ended. By connecting his leadership in the ISCM to the fellowship opportunity, Carter envisioned merging public and private spheres in United States cultural diplomacy efforts. Carter never felt a need to explain how these efforts could result in anything beyond the realm of music, because he thought exchange and communication between musicians served as an appropriate goal.

Carter’s initial application was rejected, but Francis Young, one of the overseers of the program, offered an alternative in an effort to take advantage of Carter’s success in Liège. Young proposed that Carter spend the next year in Brussels, presuming that he would already have an attentive audience there in light of the competition. However, Carter feared that a year in Brussels would do little to further his career:

As to your suggestion about my lecturing in Brussels next year – while I understand that my winning the Liège prize for my string quartet the performances of which caused a great deal of interest, I do not think that my lectures on American music would be of very great interest in Belgium. Besides this, quite selfishly, I wish to live in an important musical center next year if I stay in Europe, for in that way I can get performances of American music not well known to Europeans, and can learn what is being done on this continent. I feel that Brussels has very little to offer in this way, and for this reason I do not wish to take up your suggestion.

Carter then proposed other possible locations if France and Italy were not possible.

On the other hand, it could be that I might consider a lecturing Fulbright in either London or some large German city such as, especially Munich. My knowledge of German is slight, having studied it three years at Harvard and I could not lecture in that language. Would there be any possibility for either of these?

Finally, he attempted to use the upcoming performance of the quartet in Rome through Nabokov’s festival as evidence of his success in Europe beyond Belgium.
My string quartet is to be played here at the festival of music in the twentieth century, to which people from all over Europe will come. After seeing various composers and musicians and their reactions to my music, I will be in a much better position as to what to do next year.42

These attempts, however, were not successful, with Young telling him that England was already unavailable for more fellowships and Germany would be unlikely.43 Carter returned from Europe after only a single year, and with his success in Europe he found new audiences awaiting him in America.

**Back in America a Career Takes off**

Carter returned to America with much more favorable career prospects than when he had left it in the midst of struggling to find a full-time teaching position. By the end of 1954, his award-winning quartet had been performed in numerous concerts in the United States and Europe by the Walden quartet. And they were also in the process of preparing a recording of the work. Both the Piano and Cello Sonatas found similar success, with multiple pianists touring with the Piano Sonata in their repertoire and Bernard Greenhouse taking the Cello Sonata to Europe. His Sonata for Flute, Cello, Oboe, and Harpsichord was even seeing some performances, including one in Hamburg in January of 1955, despite the unusual ensemble.44 While in Rome he completed the Variations for Orchestra for the Louisville Orchestra to premiere in 1955, and he received a commission...
from the Koussevitzky Foundation for a sonata for two pianos, a work that could appeal to the many performers who had embraced his Piano Sonata.45

The record jacket for the string quartet recording gave Carter an important opportunity to present himself to the American public. It featured a combination of Carter’s own words, the statements of numerous reviewers, and extracts from William Glock’s article about Carter’s style. In his own comments about the work, Carter gave the first version of the narrative that would eventually develop into the well-known “to hell” statement of the Edwards interview. Rather than dismissing performers during the compositional process, in this initial statement he discussed his fears that the work would be too difficult to attract them, effectively promoting the Walden Quartet for their skill:

“My String Quartet was written in 1951 while I had a Guggenheim Fellowship that took me with my family to Tucson, Arizona, and allowed me a quiet, undisturbed year there in which to compose,” Mr. Carter added in an informal interview. “I had been waiting for just such an opportunity to give form to a number of novel ideas I had had over the previous years and to work out in an extended composition the character, expression and logic these ideas seemed to demand. It is a musical pattern which had to be invented at every step of the way and at the time, I felt that I was constantly pushing into an unexplored musical realm. This impression was later confirmed by many critics who have written about just this aspect of the work. Yet while I was composing, I must say, I often wondered whether it would ever have any critics, since I knew that the music would be very taxing both for performers and listeners and hence might never be played.

When completed, I sent the score to a number of performing groups. After six months of silence from all, the Walden Quartet, who made this record wrote that they were going to perform it at Columbia University in February, 1953.”46

45 See Meyer and Shreffler, 122-3.

46 Elliott Carter, String Quartet, The Walden Quartet of the University of Illinois, 12” LP, Columbia ML 5104.
Carter’s initial record jacket statement differs in many ways from the story presented to Edwards. He did not write the quartet rejecting audiences and critics, but rather feared that the difficulty might prevent performances. He also did not emphasize the role of the desert, seeing himself at this time as more of an international composer stylistically than an American one. Furthermore, he presents the Walden’s performance at Columbia as a surprise, but Carter had worked hard to organize a performance in New York for the quartet. In this presentation, by first depicting his uncertainty concerning the ability of performers to play the quartet, the story of his concern for a lack of performances results not so much in a personal statement of rejecting traditional institutions, but a means of praising the Walden quartet for undertaking the challenge of learning such a difficult piece. Thus, the statement reflects Carter’s life-long efforts to champion and support performers who chose to learn his music.47

Carter also took great care in his presentation of the Liège award, having already been deemed ineligible, he presented his winning the prize as a story in which he read he had won first place: “I had also sent the score to the Concours Internationale de Quatuor held by the city of Liège in Belgium, which had entries of over 150 compositions from 20 nations. One day in September, 1953, while a fellow at the American Academy in Rome, I read in the papers that my quartet had been awarded first prize.” Through a recounting of his learning that he had won the award, Carter avoided the problem of having been ineligible and therefore not actually winning the award in the end.

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47 When deciding on a type of competition for the Louisville commission, Carter initially sought to compose a concerto for either piano or cello and orchestra, requesting that the orchestra invite one of the performers of his sonatas to play the solo part. They told him that this was impossible because the orchestra played their commission on four consecutive weekends, which made engaging a soloist cost-prohibitive.
After Carter’s own discussion of his quartet, the liner notes mix brief commentary with quotations from Glock’s article and reviews by Virgil Thomson, Alfred Frankenstein, Michael Steinberg, and Desmond Shawe-Taylor. In the quotes chosen, the majority focus on the scope and complexity of the work. Virgil Thomson describes its “complex of texture… like four intricately integrated solos all going on at the same time.” Frankenstein writes about its length and grandeur and adds that it “is especially remarkable for its rhythmic complexities and the freedom of its part-writing.” Shawe-Taylor meanwhile describes it as “immense and formidable.” Through its combination of quotations from reviews and quotations from Glock’s article, the image of the quartet is not one of rejection of audiences, but of a grand and complex work that has something to express to the world. As stated by Thomson, “the audience loved it.” The image was not Carter as the solitary figure, but as a composer building on a grand tradition.

Financial Stability

Along with his increasing success and recognition both in the United States and Europe, the most important change to come about in the mid-50s for Carter’s career was financial stability. After his father’s death on December 29, 1955, Carter inherited properties which he soon sold, allowing him to end his search for a full-time teaching position. Carter was initially offered the opportunity to teach at Juilliard in the summer of 1954, by William Schuman, who confessed that he had also recommended Carter for the position of Dean of the Yale School of Music:

I want you to know that I am most enthusiastic about the possibility of your coming to Juilliard. In recent years I have watched with great satisfaction your development as composer and welcome the challenging works that are coming from your pen. Quite unknown to you I recommended you as Dean of the Yale School of Music. The only reason that I mention this personal evaluation is that at one of the meetings of the
Literature and Materials of Music Department, faculty were asked to suggest a teacher and when your name was mentioned the thought was expressed that you and I did not enjoy cordial relations. I asked the bearer of those tidings to disabuse the faculty of this notion. In esthetic terms, I have made a great effort to see that our faculty consists of varying rather than conforming points of view.⁴⁸

However, with his career beginning to take off, Carter turned down the offer to teach a combination of private composition students and a music literature course.

Carter finally accepted the opportunity to teach a modern music literature course when he was appointed as a visiting professor at Yale University in 1960, but he ultimately found this experience disappointing. His students did not meet his expectations for the proper level of preparation, and they lacked the knowledge of contemporary music he thought should be required for study at the graduate level. Carter expressed his concerns in negotiations to return to Yale in 1963, complaining that he should not be hired merely to give lectures on basic concepts of contemporary music:

Similarly, I had thought that my last year’s seminar in contemporary music would be given on a graduate level with students who know the subject and were prepared to discuss its many facets with one more experienced than they. Instead, I found the course, at my first meeting not to be a seminar at all, but a lecture course—with participants having a surprising lack of background and even interest in the subject, hence demanding the kind of preparation on my part needed for an undergraduate course. This I cannot repeat for obvious reasons—it is really an instructor’s job.⁴⁹


⁴⁹ Elliott Carter to Luther Noss, December 22, 1962, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
Carter’s ability to negotiate with the University reflected his own comfortable financial position at the time, not in need of a full-time appointment and holding competing offers from Princeton and Juilliard.50

Both Princeton and Yale were willing to hire Carter as a full-time professor with a high salary for the period ($17,000) while being flexible about his course load to accommodate these complaints. In January of 1964 Luther Noss wrote about Yale’s new offer:

We are prepared to make any teaching arrangement which would be satisfactory to you, including the appropriate salary. You would be free to teach only those composition students whom you select, and to give whatever course or courses you wished only to those students whom you consider to be properly qualified. The position could be full-time or part-time. We would, of course, be most pleased to have you here on a full-time appointment. You would be the head of the composition department, for Quincy Porter will be on leave during 1964-65, which is his final year before retiring in June of 1965. Mel Powell will continue, and possibly Yehudi Wyner, who is here this year.51

Upon seeing Carter’s continued reluctance, William Doering, the head of the science division, wrote to Carter hoping to convince him and offering to work with Carter to make any necessary changes in the music department:

If fundamental changes in the School of Music or the Department of the History of Music would make Yale more attractive to you, I would like to know about them. If additional new appointments from outside Yale could make a significant contribution to the stimulation and enjoyment which you might derive from being associated with the University, I would welcome your suggestions. If your formal teaching schedule should depart drastically from the normal pattern in order to serve better the purposes of your work which, by the very nature of its intensity, requires long uninterrupted periods, the slightest intimation will be welcomed. The least I can do is make your thoughts and wishes known to the Executive

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50 In addition to the positions I discuss here, a letter from Paul Fromm in 1961 to Helen Carter makes reference to Elliott Carter’s rejection of Juilliard considering him for their presidency.

51 Luther Noss to Elliott Carter, January 9, 1964, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
Committee of the Faculty of the Arts and Sciences. Its members already know how important I consider your return to Yale. I would like to do whatever I can to help bring it about.\textsuperscript{52}

Around the same time as Yale’s generous offer, Princeton actively recruited Carter to join their faculty as a full-time member. After an in-person meeting with Carter, Arthur Mendel sent a letter summing up their interest in him and addressing Carter’s concerns with accepting a full-time position.

The feelings that our wanting you to come is conditional on your wishing to really join the Department as a full member—in its choice of students, in its decisions on educational policy, and in its teaching—is shared by many but not all members of the Department. Any counter-proposal you might wish to make would be carefully considered by all of us. It is not impossible that we might accept some other arrangement, and I know that you would not be offended if we decided we could not.

After beginning with an emphasis on their expectation that Carter participate fully in the department, he turned to outlining the numerous ways in which Carter could take time off to compose. “In short,” he sums up “you could count on considerable free time… What I am trying to say is that while we want you to be a full member of the Department, we do not mean to lay down any hard and fast conditions, and are quite ready to consider any suggestions you may have for reconciling the demands of teaching with those of composition.”\textsuperscript{53}

While he still did not have a large income from his compositions, Carter’s inheritance allowed him to reject both offers of full-time positions and avoid the challenge of developing and teaching classes that in his previous experience occupied too much of his time. In his response to Doering he explained: “I found that when teaching

\textsuperscript{52} William Doering to Elliott Carter, March 10, 1964, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

\textsuperscript{53} Arthur Mendel to Elliott Carter, December 19, 1963, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
only one seminar two years ago I spent half the week preparing to raise the level of
discussion above shop-worn points of view which seemed to be all the students were
either capable of or interested in.”

He expanded, writing to Luther Noss, the Dean of Yale’s School of Music, declaring that he felt to be a successful teacher would require a commitment he could not make at this point in his career, having already fallen behind:

I am sorry not to have answered you sooner. I have appreciated your interest and wish to have me back at Yale and for this reason I have reconsidered the matter again and again. As I told Allen Forte in New York, I am very reluctant to return to the teaching of composition now because the field of music is changing so fast that it takes a great deal of time and effort merely to keep up with what is going on, an absolute necessity for effective teaching today. At present I do not have the time to follow new musical thought, to compose – both very demanding efforts – and also to teach. Too, I do not believe that composition can be taught as it has been taught, and would find it extremely time-consuming to devise the necessary new methods particularly as they must be rethought in every aspect of compositional discipline. Probably this will have to be done partly by trial and error over a number of years. If I had had a consistent academic career, I would, by now, be well on the way to doing this, but as it is I do not feel that now I can start from scratch. In fact the very question of whether composition can be taught in any usual sense, given the special position that contemporary composition occupies in the field of music, is to me a very moot one. Since all the present uncertainties result necessarily in endless arguments with the more intelligent students (and should), I cannot say that I really enjoy teaching at all. I know what I think and what I want to do in my own work, and I hope that my works – not my arguments – will make my point of view valid. Since I do not believe that others should slavishly follow what I am doing I am very uneasy about discussing my own music, particularly with students, because it is nearly impossible to be articulate and complete about something so personal and intimate. Teaching composition hence involves devising a method, and I have not.

After expressing his own insecurities about how he could teach students in the contemporary compositional world, Carter turned to his impression of students. He felt

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54 Elliott Carter to William Doering, undated, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
that many students lacked motivation, and viewed him as merely an important name for applications:

Another thing which gives an added reluctance to return to teaching, is that I find that the great majority of students do not seem to have the slightest interest or concern with the imagination, thought and effort which should go into responsible teaching, but rather consider it something the teacher owes them—event to the point of acting like spoiled children and trying to slip by with as little work as possible. They treat the teacher merely as a reputable name which is duty-bound to be signed to their applications for prize contests, grants, fellowships, so how can the teacher help but be bored by the students? In an effort to be a responsible teacher, I have often had the impression that few had any inkling of that, nor did they feel any sense of responsibility toward me. Experience here in Berlin has brought this home to me brutally. Neither of my two former Yale students who were brought here to study with me have ever shown up for a lesson, even though I went to bat for them and got them grants, which they accepted gladly. Now I am put in a most embarrassing position before the Ford Foundation, but one, I feel quite typical of such situations and which I heartily dislike.

For all these reasons, I have decided to refuse all the offers to teach that have been made to me this year. I hope you can understand my delay in answering, I do not like to have to come to this decision because it reveals how impatient and annoyed so many of my contacts with teaching has made me. 55

Instead, Carter accepted a position at Juilliard, with the promise that he could teach composition lessons to students of his choosing.

Carter’s wealth also provided him with more leverage in his negotiations with the United States government when asked to participate in cultural diplomacy efforts. He was not reliant upon government funds to attend foreign festivals, enabling him to continue building relationships in many countries that the government overlooked in their music-related diplomacy efforts. Carter’s trip to Poland was particularly fruitful in developing interest from an audience otherwise unfamiliar with American composition, and making contacts with more experimental Soviet composers. Carter’s wealth also enabled him to

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55 Elliott Carter to Luther Noss, March 11, 1964, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
financially support performers who risked their own financial well-being by performing contemporary music that often failed to draw the large audiences and orchestra engagements of those performing the nineteenth-century masterpieces. His financial stability, however, does not mean that Carter was unconcerned with remuneration. Throughout his career he sought appropriate fees for his commissions, teaching, and appearances, even if many times he in turn donated the fee back to the organization which had paid him.

The 1960 Soviet Union Tour and Negotiating with the Government

Throughout the 1950s Carter continued to develop his European reputation through maintaining the friendships he developed while living there, which led to further performances of his music and invitations to return for various festivals. One of Carter’s most important connections was with William Glock, who wrote about Carter’s music and invited Carter to teach at the Dartington Summer School. Carter attempted to participate in governmental cultural diplomacy efforts again in 1958 when he was invited to participate in the Warsaw festival in Poland, a nation with a highly active ISCM chapter and a thriving contemporary music scene. Carter wrote directly to Frederic Colwell, the specialist overseeing international exchanges asking for financial support for the trip. Again, Carter learned that government funds would only be earmarked for specific countries, and they lacked support for activities in Poland.

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56 Carter began giving performance awards to performers in the early 1960s through the Paul Fromm Foundation, initially to support the soloists for the premiere of the Double Concerto, but then expanding to annual support for a number of musicians touring with his compositions in Fromm’s name. As a leading supporter of new music, Fromm was happy to collaborate with Carter in this endeavor.

57 For example, Carter donated the money he received for the Symphony of Three Orchestras to the New York Philharmonic.
Carter’s attempts to work with the government in cultural diplomacy efforts, combined with his apparent success in Europe, led Colwell to invite Carter to participate in a cultural exchange program with the Soviet Union, initially planned for 1959:

I recall that you wrote to me last summer inquiring whether the Department could assist you in your plans to visit Poland where you had been invited to participate as an observer in the Polish Music Festival. Unfortunately, limitations placed upon the use of our funds in that area at that time, prevented us from assisting you.

I am writing you now to inquire whether you might be interested in participating in the Department’s cultural exchange program with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.\(^{58}\)

From a musical perspective, Carter was an ideal fit for the trip. His approach to modernism and the difficulty of many of his works would compliment Copland, who had already accepted an invitation to participate, by revealing the broad range of styles and methods available to American composers. Doing so would offer a stark contrast to the apparent enforced uniformity of Soviet compositions.

Initially Carter refused to take part because he needed to complete the Double Concerto and begin the Piano Concerto. Perhaps he also still retained some anger concerning the lack of support for his trip to Poland:

I regret very much but I will be unable to accept the kind invitation of the State Department to send me to the Soviet Union. After my return from Europe, I wrote you rather non-committally in order to acknowledge the receipt of your letter. Now as the full extent of the work I have engaged myself to complete – commissions from the Fromm Foundation and the Ford Foundation, accepted some time ago – becomes clearer to me, I find that I will be unable to leave for any length of time until these are completed.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Frederick A. Colwell to Elliott Carter, June 12, 1959, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

\(^{59}\) Elliott Carter to Frederick A. Colwell, August 25, 1959, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
Apparently he changed his mind after a phone conversation between Helen Carter and a Mr. Sanchez of the State Department (during this time the date of the tour also changed from 1959 to 1960):

Dear Mr. Carter:
In accordance with the telephone conversation Mr. Sanchez of my office had with Mrs. Carter concerning the possibility of your going to the Soviet Union with Mr. Aaron Copland, I would like to know as soon as possible if you would be available for one but preferably two months starting March 11, 1960. As you probably know Mr. Copland has indicated his availability for this project from March 14 to April 11, 1960.
I mentioned that we would like to have you available for two months as we believe that a series of lectures could be arranged for you in other Eastern European countries immediately upon your departure from the Soviet Union. Unfortunately Mr. Copland has informed us that previous engagements prevent him from participating in this extended tour.60

While Copland accepted the offer to serve his government, believing that cultural communication could lead to peace, Carter sought to negotiate with the government to ensure that the trip would be valuable in furthering his own career, which he believed was only possible if his compositions were performed in the Soviet Union. Carter was particularly concerned with orchestras, both the most prestigious American musical institutions and the most resistant to performing new works by American composers.61

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60 Frederick A. Colwell to Elliott Carter, January 26, 1960, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
61 Carter’s approach to the importance of orchestral premieres comes across in his negotiations concerning the first performance of the Piano Concerto. The concerto was written as a part of a commissioning project by the Ford Foundation designed to connect young and rising American soloists with American composers. Carter agreed to write the Piano Concerto, a type of work he had contemplated writing at least as early as 1952 when he negotiated his commission from the Louisville Symphony. Originally the premiere was scheduled for the Denver Symphony Orchestra, but Carter quickly grew suspicious of a premiere in front of an audience unfamiliar with his compositions. Once he learned that the Ford Foundation chose the Denver Symphony Carter wrote to Sol Caston of the orchestra to ask about Denver audiences’ responses to his works thus far, probably well aware that they were unfamiliar. Carter then requested the ability to change the premiere and drew attention from Eric Leinsdorf and Lukas Foss, both looking to conduct the work. Carter then negotiated with these orchestras, attempting to ensure sufficient rehearsal time and a proper premiere, eventually getting the Boston Symphony to include it in a subscription series concert. Some of Carter’s fears did come true as the work did not receive its New York Premiere until 1975 (by the American Symphony Orchestra) almost a decade after its composition.
The Soviet tour, which would also involve the New York Philharmonic, seemed like a
perfect opportunity for these negotiations. Carter hoped that the government could
demand that the ensemble he admired throughout his childhood finally perform his
compositions.

Knowing that part of the American message was the power of freedom, Carter did
not directly demand they include his works in return for his participation. Instead he
began by questioning the effectiveness of the trip, declaring that he would only go if he
were certain that he could serve his country productively: “I have many works of music I
am committed to finish at the time and would not like to interrupt my composing unless I
were absolutely convinced that my trip to Russia under the auspices of the Department of
State would serve a useful purpose to my country.” Carter then described his experience
as a judge at an ISCM competition in Cologne, and the success American composers saw
there. He explained that he even decided to pay for the trip himself because he felt it
would be so valuable: “Since I was invited by the ISCM and the German Radio to
participate on this jury, I considered this trip very useful in terms of encouraging respect
for American composers and their accomplishments – so important that I was willing to
pay the trans-Atlantic air-fare myself.”

After establishing himself as a successful diplomat through his time in Cologne,
Carter continued the letter with a list of problems he perceived with the trip to Russia that
could prevent the trip from matching his earlier diplomatic successes. He began with a
discussion of the state of orchestral music in America and the fees composers received
for performances of their works. He explained that American orchestras were willing to
pay foreign, and especially Soviet, composers significant sums for the right to perform their new compositions, while offering almost nothing to domestic composers.

A) The leading Soviet composers have been played more widely in the United States than any American composers. Some of them have been remunerated in a way that no American composer has ever been remunerated. Shostakovich was paid by the NBC symphony, during the war, $20,000 for the right of the US first performance of his 7th Symphony. Most of us were and are paid about $100 for NBC or other orchestral performances and while Soviet composers can live on their commissions, we receive at most $1,000 for a large work, so that we are always being asked by the Income Tax Bureau whether our music is not really a hobby.

Carter continued the discussion by tying the disparity between fees to a potential condemnation of the American “free” political system:

The discrepancy between the acceptance of Soviet music right here in the United States and the acceptance of even the most frequently played Americans is ludicrous, certainly not very flattering to ourselves or our notions of freedom. For we deplore the results, while eagerly enjoying them, of Soviet musical dictatorship, and hail the results of American musical freedom without bothering to play or listen to them. I do not honestly see how any American composer can conceal this embarrassing situation, or explain it away convincingly to the Russians.

He then used himself as an example, bemoaning his own lack of success with American orchestras, pointing out that his works saw more performances abroad then at home.

Working under such conditions, especially in light of the favorable treatment of Soviet composers in America, he argued that he could not make a strong case for the value of America’s artistic freedom.

B) In my particular case, no US performers or orchestras have ever played any work of mine on their trips to the Soviet Union. The NY Philharmonic, like many other American visiting orchestras have played a preponderance of Soviet music in the Soviet Union. They play more of it when the Soviet composers visit the US. The Soviet orchestras visiting the US play Soviet music here, and when American composers go to Russia a lot more Soviet music is played for them there.
Carter then turned to the concept of artistic freedom that cultural diplomacy sought to champion. In this regard, his complex and challenging works could never exist in the Soviet Union, where composers were restricted by their need to appeal to the masses. Carter’s complex works placed demands on both performers and audiences. As such, if Soviet audiences were to understand his compositions and how his access to freedom enabled him to write such works, they would need multiple hearings to understand the techniques Western composers had developed:

Now, my works take a good deal of rehearsal, and because I have enjoyed American liberty they are rather unusual in character and would be very perplexing to Soviet orchestras and audiences because of their lack of experience in the newer musical techniques. There is a very good chance that they would be played badly and misunderstood generally – if under the circumstances, I were there and could point out that US orchestras played them better and the works received American acceptance, there might be a point in this, but since they are not played here either, do you think it would be good propaganda to say that only in Germany and England are they played? (Which is a fact) Therefore, as a tax payer, I am not at all convinced that I should be sent as a composer.

Carter ended the letter by returning to his success in Cologne and declaring that if he were to merely go to the Soviet Union as a tourist he would not need government funds. If they wished to send him as an artistic diplomat he should be able to speak to some success at home: “in going as an American composer singled out from others for this honor, I think that I have the right to be represented as an important figure in our culture – as I was in Cologne – and not as someone trying unsuccessfully to give the impression that American culture can keep up its end in the field of musical composition.”

Shreffler and Meyer, in reprinting this letter, propose that the statement results in part from Carter’s ignorance at the time of the repression of Soviet composers, but there

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is little reason to believe this. In his lectures on Soviet music from later in the decade he discussed the restrictions on Soviet composers. Nabokov, whose advice Carter sought for this trip also would not have allowed Carter to believe compositional life in the Soviet Union was as great as could be inferred from this letter. I believe that Carter assumed his statement praising aspects of Soviet musical life in comparison with America would be taken seriously and would be the most effective means of trying to appeal to the government to support American artists.\(^{63}\)

Carter still did not immediately rule out the possibility of going. He wrote to both Nabokov and Paul Fromm asking for advice. Nabokov was encouraging, hoping it would allow Carter to stop in Paris on the way: “By all means, go to Russia my dear, but before you go please stop in Paris. I will give you interesting addresses in Russia of people you should see.”\(^{64}\) Fromm on the other hand shared Carter’s concerns about being used by the government, and the lack of support for the arts in the United States: “I well understand why you hesitate to go to Russia. Touring and sightseeing is one thing; being exploited

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\(^{63}\) Meyer and Shreffler, 159-160. In some regards, Carter was disingenuous when he claimed that his compositions were only performed abroad, as many of his works were seeing great success in the United States, particularly his Piano Sonata and Cello Sonata. It is possible that he was interested in more performances for his orchestral works, however, these were not frequently performed in Europe either. The New York Philharmonic did perform the *Holiday Overture* in 1957, which previously was performed in Baltimore in 1948 and New York by the CBS Symphony in 1950. It does not seem to have fared any better in European performances, and his Variations was only premiered in 1957 by the Louisville Philharmonic and then performed in Baden-Baden in 1958. The Suite from the Minotaur and Symphony No. 1 also had seen a few performances around the United States, but as far as I can tell none in Europe. Carter’s interest in trying to use the government to encourage American orchestras to play American works abroad would have wide-ranging implications. One of the primary problems Carter found with his orchestral works throughout his career was that they required a large amount of rehearsal time which American orchestras did not have. This meant that American performances, when they did happen, tended to be of lesser quality. Inclusion of a major foreign tour however, would alleviate this problem as it would result in much greater rehearsal time, and would also lead to inclusion of the work in regular seasons. In fact, later in the 1960s, Carter would frequently complain that his orchestral works were never performed well in Germany, and a bad performance could be worse than no performance at all, especially as recordings were becoming ubiquitous as an alternative for audiences interested in modern music.

\(^{64}\) Nicolas Nabokov to Elliott Carter, January 28, 1960, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
for political propaganda is another. Culture must begin at home.”

As a leading patron of new music in the United States and a champion of Carter’s compositions, Fromm probably shared Carter’s frustrations with the struggles of American composers to find sufficient performances and remuneration for their works.

Despite Carter’s reluctance to participate and complaints about American musical life, Colwell continued to try to engage Carter in visiting the Soviet Union, asking again in a letter from July 27 of 1960, now as part of an American specialists program:

Some months ago we had some correspondence in regard to your joining Aaron Copland and some other musicians for a group tour to the U.S.S.R. You wrote us very frankly why you felt you would not care to join the group. However you expressed interest in the U.S.S.R. itself, so we are writing again.

In the cultural exchange agreement, mention was made of individual musicians visiting the U.S.S.R. for two or three months including performances and consultations and conferences with musicians and others in the field in various parts of the country. I realize that you are a composer, but since the details of this agreement are not exactly spelled out, we are trying various aspects, and feel that a representative American composer could well fit in this category. If you are interested in this idea, would you fill in the enclosed biographical form, and on the last page give some idea of what you would like to do, and where you would like to visit, and we will see how it develops.

Colwell probably assumed that this type of long-term exchange designed to build connections between musicians from the two sides would hold greater appeal for Carter who had emphasized his ability to connect with composers from other nations. However, Carter again refused, having already agreed to a position as a visiting professor at Yale University and still needing to finish commissions he had already agreed to:

I am sorry to have to put you off again. Unfortunately I have accepted a professorship at Yale University for the coming year and what with that

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65 Paul Fromm to Elliott Carter, July 28, 1959, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

and, a number of commissions for musical compositions that urgently need to be finished, I do not feel that I can accept the State Department’s very interesting offer for the next year at least.

Carter then continued by re-emphasizing the value of performances in foreign nations over visits by composers. He pointed to a letter sent by a Hungarian critic who heard the Julliard Quartet perform his Second Quartet and now wished to learn more about Carter and publish an article about his works. Again Carter points out that he feels government money would be better spent on sending scores and recordings than for personal visits, emphasizing the cultural product as opposed to the artist.

You may be interested to know that the Julliard String Quartet played my new Second String Quartet a few weeks ago in Budapest and I have received a very interesting letter from one of the leading Hungarian critics who wishes to write an article on my music. I am sending him a number of my scores and recordings (at my own expense since such practical matters as exchange of actual music does not seem to come under any budget). In my opinion, this kind of cultural exchange is far more important and valuable than personal visit – at least to professionals. 67

Carter, here gets to the fundamental difference between his vision of cultural diplomacy and the government’s. For the government the music itself was less important than the artist as a person. Many involved in planning these programs probably did not find aesthetic value in modern compositions. For professional diplomats and politicians a conversation that would take place in a reception after a concert, or a presentation by a composer about his music to the public before the concert, had more practical value than the music itself. In these situations the composer or diplomat could talk about the advantages of the American system and the value of artistic freedom. The concert merely served as a means of bringing people together to have these conversations. Carter, however, viewed his compositions as a means of communication, and often hesitated to

67 Elliott Carter to Frederick A. Colwell, August 11, 1960, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
give lectures on his own music because he felt that his musical thoughts should not be hindered by his imprecise words. Thus, the concert experience of listening to the music served the diplomatic ends of communication.

In the case of the Juilliard Quartet performance in Hungary, the work had successfully communicated something about Carter’s compositions and perhaps America to the critic, who felt inspired to learn more through acquiring more of Carter’s scores and recordings. The critic, as the music expert in his community, would then publish his findings based on the other scores and recordings sent by Carter to be read by audiences in Hungary and beyond. Through this process, Carter would reach multiple audiences with no need for his own physical presence. This built on the experience Wolff described to Carter in Liège, where his victory served as a means for the people of Liège to seek further information about America and its musical life, again without Carter’s physical presence.

Carter’s efforts to advise officials on how to spend their funding in support of the arts was not limited to the government. In 1961 he was asked to recommend opera singers for a Ford Foundation program that paid for promising young singers to study in Europe, presumably to increase their chances of a career in the United States, a concept that certainly should have held appeal for Carter. Despite his understanding of the value of European recognition for American audiences from his own experience, Carter wrote a lengthy response to the Ford Foundation outlining many of his concerns about the state of American musical life. He began by stating his perception of America having an abundance of talented performers:

Thank you for sending me an application for nomination of artists for your program. I do have in mind several names that I might suggest, but I am
not at all convinced about the program itself. In the United States we have one appalling situation and that is large scale public apathy to serious music and consequently a grave lack of appreciation of its various accomplishments and the necessity of a background against which these can be attained. As a musical nation, for the cost of production, for the amount of interest there is among young people in the career of music, and above all for the talent and skill which so many of our citizens possess we are pitiful consumers. There is tragic overproduction of talent, or trained musicians, of highly specialized skills among a people scarcely aware of what these skills and training entail, unable to enjoy or appreciate them, and consequently unwilling to pay for them.

Carter then pointed out that for these performers to succeed they would need a cultivated audience in America, or else their talents will be wasted because current American audiences were unable to accurately evaluate a good performance:

Before more people are encouraged by grants to study further skills, develop their talents and gain experience abroad, before more commissions are given to write more music, it would seem logical to find a way to stimulate a public interest and appreciation of these things. Otherwise all of this “gravy train” leads inevitably to personal misery, wasted talents, wasted education fitting people for lives they cannot lead for want of opportunities here – compositions that nobody wants to hear. No amount of excellence will overcome this apathy. In our profession, we have all seen the public spurn high American excellence in favor of excellence established and given publicity abroad. Our public is no judge, and one cannot be sure that they are interested in real works of music and real performances of high quality enough to really learn about them and appreciate them highly, than many of the organizations that spend money to house such performances or encourage study in them.

Carter suggested that the Ford Foundation pursue a study to find ways of developing American musical life.

In the meantime, Carter sought to focus the Ford Foundation’s efforts on composers, who he argued were poorly remunerated in comparison to the large economic infrastructure their works supported, from copyists to architects.

It seems to me urgently necessary that a serious fact-finding program, managed by seriously involved musical professionals be undertaken to find out just what kind of a relationship exists between the public and the
musical profession here. Certainly the fact that on every level money is being lost—that composer furnished compositions written (if they are paid for) at wages of about 25 to 50 cents an hour—these compositions keep copyists at 2.00–4.00 an hour busy for weeks, afford employment for music editors, presidents of music concerns, managers of Foundations, afford orchestral musicians employment—each making more money to play the work than the composer made on it—afford opportunities for conductors to make careers—buildings like Lincoln Center are built to house their performances. These powerful pieces of paper, music scores are the corner stone of the vast musical operation—obviously, and yet what care goes into them is scarcely known or understood by the general musical public. I point to this because it is my part of the profession. I notice that similar things have been said in a recent hearing on the performing arts before the government.\(^{68}\)

Carter’s insistence that the Ford Foundation explore ways to improve the situation in America before sending more musicians for training to Europe evidently had little impact on either side. Only two years later Carter gladly accepted an invitation to live in Berlin on a Ford Foundation Fellowship, which resulted in further complaints concerning the lack of planning and institutional support on the part of the foundation.

**Defining Himself through Writing in the Early 1960s**

While the Cello Sonata and First Quartet have been seen as transitional pieces in Carter’s move from neoclassicism to a new form of modernism, theorists have pointed to the Second Quartet as the beginning of yet another transition, when Carter became more systematic in his methods. The Second Quartet also became a major breakthrough work in his domestic reputation. The First Quartet did not see much success in the United States until he returned with awards from Europe, but the second provided Carter with instant domestic recognition including his first Pulitzer Prize followed by the quick accumulation of teaching and fellowship offers, described above, in addition to numerous new offers for commissions. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Carter’s attempts to

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\(^{68}\) Elliott Carter to Ford Foundation, November 24, 1961, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
find more systematic methods aligned with his distaste for the concurrent development and popularity of chance composition and improvisation.

Perhaps inspired by both his recent domestic success and his methodological development, Carter attempted to write a personal statement in 1961, a draft of which survives in the Sacher Stiftung archives. In this personal statement, Carter wrote primarily about his desire for music to serve as a means of communication. Such a focus aligns with his emphasis to the government that performances of his compositions could have a greater effect than his physical presence. A lot of the statement deals with the relationship between the composer and audience. Carter explains that he feels obliged to provide the audience with some new idea or thought when they listen to his works. Furthermore, those who try to bypass the communicative power of music may be successful initially, but their success could only be superficial, and not the lasting work that Carter has sought to create throughout his career (as seen in the discussion of durable music in Chapter One).  

He concluded by writing about the idea of professionalism:

Professionalism, at best, provides a link between the composer and his performers and reaching beyond them to his listeners. In a way the composer cannot be said to compose for the public at all – at least directly, and perhaps at times, it may even be undesirable for him to consider the public at all, even though his art is a more public art than most others except that of the theatre. There have been a number of cases of composers who, relying on their professional training for standards, went in a direction directly counter to that expected of them at the time, only to finally have their works become more highly treasured by musicians and the public than their more conforming colleagues. It is professional training that allowed such a development to come to a satisfactory conclusion, just as it is professional skill and taste that gives the works of composers, like Rossini and Verdi who did write directly for their public, an important part of their continuing interest. Whether a composer writes

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for or against his public, it seems fairly clear that he must invent and imagine within the frame of professional standards if he wishes to be fairly certain that if he has enough talent his works will have the intrinsic qualities that give the musical profession and performers their reason for existence.\footnote{Elliott Carter, “Statement 1961,” Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.}

Carter insisted that this idea of professionalism and the goal of meaningful communication did not necessarily imply that the composer writes for the public. Carter did not specify whether he considered himself as a composer writing for the public, but we can see the establishment of a position for a composer to write “against” her/his audience, so long as these works are of high quality they can still become treasured later.

While this statement was never published, the development of *Perspectives of New Music* gave Carter the opportunity to write a series of articles on various topics, much like he had done for *Modern Music* two decades earlier. In his personal statement Carter labeled trends he did not like as unprofessional and superficial, capable only of light entertainment at best. For *Perspectives* Carter turned back to nationalism and argued that the state of American audiences meant that the mere act of composing and upholding the European tradition placed American composers in rebellion against their society and the poor quality of mass culture. Thus, the same experiments which he saw derived from “nihilistic defiance” in the hands of European composers for the American composer “affirms his identity and the identity of American music.”\footnote{Carter “The Milieu of the American Composer” *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (1962): 150.} Carter’s attempt to integrate the wide range of American compositional experiments into his construction of an American identity offers a fascinating counterpart to Milton Babbitt’s declamation of the composer as a specialist. Carter placed the responsibility for communication in the

\footnote{Elliott Carter, “Statement 1961,” Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.}

\footnote{Carter “The Milieu of the American Composer” *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (1962): 150.}
composer-audience relationship with the composer. The trained composer is responsible as a professional for creating music that can communicate with audiences. For Babbitt the demands were placed on the audience. Based on the comparison of a concert to an academic paper in the sciences, Babbitt expects that if an audience member does not comprehend a composition it is her/his fault for not sufficiently studying the topic.  

Unlike Babbitt who embraced music’s new role in the university as a research endeavor, for Carter the university threatened to undermine music’s role in communication.

The fact that this struggle is increasingly carried out under the protection of the universities implies the danger, on the other hand, that music may be assimilated to other university disciplines that deal in historical, semantic, acoustical, or psychological research, and thus be destroyed as a public artistic communication. Once compositions are treated as illustrations or examples of general principles rather than for what they are in themselves they lose a large measure of their significance.

Carter questioned what might happen next in music’s life in the university. Would music merely become an object of study for a wide variety of scholars, losing the power of communication that defined music as an art form? He concluded by comparing art to a plant, transferred into a new environment (from Europe to America), predicting that despite many challenges it will fight and succeed in surviving.

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72 Milton Babbitt “Who Cares if You Listen?” *High Fidelity* (February, 1958). Carter certainly agreed that American audiences were not familiar enough with contemporary music to accurately judge it, but he used this as a basis for his arguments that orchestras should be encouraged to play more, believing that if audiences heard enough contemporary music (both good and bad) they would gain the ability to determine which pieces were effective and which were not.

At the Center of the Cold War in West Berlin

Carter’s domestic and international reputation continued to grow in the early 1960s. After the Second Quartet won the Pulitzer Prize it was selected as the winner of an informal UNESCO competition held in Berlin in 1961, which promised numerous broadcasts during the upcoming year. The quartet was also performed in Tokyo at the East-West Festival sponsored by the CCF, with Carter in attendance. From 1962 to 1963 Carter spent another year at the American Academy in Rome, and his presence in Europe in conjunction with his cultural diplomacy experience made him an ideal candidate for further promotion. He was first approached with the idea of going to Berlin by George Moody, who was organizing the “First Berlin Music Festival” in April 1963 on behalf of the Berlin Senat. In his letter to Carter, Moody described grand ambitions for a weeklong festival that would bring together leading figures from throughout the art world and would make use of the numerous performing organizations of the city including the Philharmonic and the opera house, both of which would premiere new works by American composers:

The Festival will encompass music of the 20th Century of all styles and from many countries. The Senat is very interested in having a large participation from the United States with no limitation on size. The foremost living composers of the western world will be invited to spend one week in Berlin at the expense of the Senat, to engage in seminars and public discussions and to give lectures. Since the Senat does not wish this festival to resemble others already existing in Europe, it will expand the activities to include lectures on related arts, inviting people such as Jean Cocteau, Andre Malraux, T. S. Eliot, Henry Moore, Thornton Wilder, among others. The Festival will put at the disposal of the participants the various musical organizations of Berlin – the Philharmonic Orchestra, Radio Symphony Orchestra, Academy of Arts, School of Music, and the Berlin Opera.
Moody continued describing perhaps the most ambitious aspect of the plan, to commission a brand new opera by an American composer to be premiered at the festival.

Director Sellner of the Opera wishes to introduce a new American opera in a world premiere during the Festival, staged by Sellner himself. The opera can be an ambitious work calling upon all modern resources of the musical stage. This would present an opportunity for an American composer difficult to equal: one of the foremost opera houses in the world in one of the most dramatic cities in the world. The Senat is also interested in the first performance of a symphonic work, as well, or possibly in its first European performance.⁷⁴

Carter quickly expressed his interest in participating in the festival, but when he received an update in January of 1963 plans had already begun to change.⁷⁵

In January 1963 Denise Abbey wrote to Carter to tell him that they no longer planned for him to participate in the large festival. Instead the State Department Mission in Berlin sought to establish a series of radio broadcasts with the RIAS about American music. Their vision involved bringing a different composer each month throughout the year. While in Berlin, composers would supervise a recording of one of their compositions, record a self portrait for radio broadcast, and give public lectures. Because Carter was not a composer who would quickly write a new work for premiere at a large festival, and in light of his earlier complaints that groups were more interested in his physical presence than the sound of his compositions, this second option may have been preferable to the large festival environment. This would be particularly true if it meant overseeing a good recording of one of his recent works. Carter agreed to participate in

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⁷⁵ Carter’s response was not saved, but Moody wrote again on October. Thanking him for his reply and letting him know that an officer would get in touch with him with further details.
this program in late April. This would also overlap with the originally discussed festival, which was now going to be significantly smaller.

Plans changed yet again in late February, when Carter heard from Edward Alexander of the United States Information Service. Alexander explained that the Berlin Senat had initially sent Washington a list of thirty composers to be invited to the festival. However, they then decided to expand and highlight accomplishments in other arts as well as music and only invite Copland, who had already expressed interest. Because Carter’s trip to participate in the radio program would coincide with the festival, the state department still wanted him to participate in some way. Instead of arranging performances, they asked Carter to participate in a panel discussing recent works by other composers.76 Carter hesitated, writing in an undated letter to Alexander that he feared he agreed to participate too quickly and would prefer not to participate in a panel about music by others. Taking advantage of his financial stability, Carter suggested that instead of participating in the government program he could finance his own trip to Berlin where he would go to the opera as a private citizen.77

Again Carter discussed the problems with Nabokov who was sponsoring the festival, now called Begegnungen, through the CCF. By the end of March Nabokov had arranged for the inclusion of Carter’s Cello Sonata in a recital to be taped by the RIAS. Furthermore, recognizing the government’s interest in personal meetings and pageantry,

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76 Edward Alexander to Elliott Carter, February 27, 1963, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

77 Elliott Carter to Edward Alexander, undated, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
Nabokov organized a large reception to follow the recital, during which the Senator for Culture would officially invite Carter to participate in Begegnungen.\footnote{His letters do not document the actual activities in the Berlin festival, other than that while there he did record an introduction for radio broadcasts of his works and he was reimbursed for the trip by the State Department.}

Amidst the planning for his trip to the Begegnungen festival, Carter was also invited for a longer stay in the city as the inaugural composer in a Ford Foundation Fellowship program, which would include him and two students of his choice. While he had complained about such overseas training expenditures having little value when musicians returned to a mostly apathetic American audience, he was happy to continue furthering his own career, especially in a major European center. Carter also continued to find these years abroad productive for his compositions, and he continued to have more commissions than he could fulfill at his slow pace of completing a piece every two or three years.

Upon the completion of his residency, Carter again criticized the Ford Foundation for its poor handling of overseas awards. However, unlike the opera program which he criticized for a lack of promotion in America for trainees upon their return, in Berlin his problem was a lack of activities during his stay. Carter struggled to find any recognition in Berlin’s cultural circles and had to wait months for the performance of one of his works, which would serve as the ideal means of introducing himself to this new audience. In his statement he argued that the goal of bringing composers to the city held great potential for helping to develop the city’s artistic life, but it also brought along new challenges of management and vision that had not been met:

Obviously such an idea requires, even for a measure of success, much more than a group of international artists living and working in the city,
more than money; it requires, above all, intelligent direction that keeps the ultimate intention clearly in mind, a direction with a vision consistent with the broadness of scope of the original conception. During the first year of the operation of this plan, which was my period of tenure, this vision was either entirely lacking or else lost in a maze of small problems. Consequently, the presence of “artists-in-residence” in Berlin seemed pointless. Those of us who had accepted to participate at considerable personal sacrifice, exchanging cultural milieu where an active interest in our work is taken for one in which we are scarcely known, receiving less financial return and less comfortable living quarters than we are accustomed to at home, did so because of our enthusiasm for the idea and were deeply disappointed. Instead of cultural participation, we found ourselves living in agreeable surroundings, paid, and left alone, entirely unconnected with the activities of Berlin’s cultural life in spite of our wishes. Aware of this problem, the managers of the project made occasional misguided efforts to secure feeble and often embarrassing newspaper publicity for us – of the kind useful for bureaucratic reports but hardly useful for cultural exchange.79

Participating in the Berlin program, Carter found himself again struggling to reconcile his own ambition to use cultural diplomacy programs to further his career and the vision of the programs, interested in what he calls bureaucratic reports. He told Die Zeit, also in October of 1964, that he would have preferred to have his compositions performed in Berlin while he remained in New York due to his inability to break into the Berlin musical scene. Perhaps ironically, Carter was able to compose quite effectively during his tenure in Berlin, making great progress towards the completion of the Piano Concerto that he had been working on for many years up to that point. Furthermore, his experience in Berlin in the center of the Cold War may have inspired the antagonistic relationship between piano and orchestra that came to define the work’s narrative.80

79 Meyer and Shreffler, 187-188.

80 Another reason Carter was apparently upset with the Berlin program was that the students he brought with him also seemed to abandon him there, as seen in the letter to Luther Noss earlier in this chapter.
An Expert on Soviet Music

While Carter never visited Soviet Russia, his frequent travels in Europe allowed him to become familiar with Soviet music and develop connections with Soviet composers. Due to these connections he was invited to Sarah Lawrence College in 1967 to participate in a panel discussion in preparation for a concert featuring avant-garde music of the Soviet Union.\(^{81}\) Carter was asked to compare life for Soviet avant-garde composers with that for Americans. While he made no attempts to downplay the harsh reality of Soviet censorship, he also refused to praise the system in the United States, suggesting that his own nation had created a capitalist version of avant-garde censorship that can be equally repressive despite the prominent narratives of freedom and individuality.\(^{82}\)

He began the talk by discussing Shostakovich and Prokofiev, the two Soviet composers most familiar to American audiences.\(^{83}\) In his discussion, Carter followed a standard American narrative of their development, declaring that both began writing in an avant-garde style, but were forced by Soviet institutions to compose in a more popular idiom:

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\(^{81}\) This panel took place in the middle of the massive expansion of Soviet Studies in American Universities throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For an overview of these programs and their history and relationship to the Cold War see David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

\(^{82}\) In this section I follow Carter and the Sarah Lawrence program’s lead in adopting a broad definition of avant-gardism. Throughout my own discussion of Carter’s music I have consciously avoided the term because I feel it has frequently been misappropriated by scholars and composers, who in a Cold War environment celebrating freedom had an interest in promoting their own works as avant-garde (paralleling the idea of the maverick discussed in the previous chapter). For a history of the term see Matei Călinescu *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kisch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

\(^{83}\) Carter’s talk survives through a combination of drafts of texts and an audio recording all held at the Paul Sacher Stiftung. Jonathan Bernard compiled and edited these into an essay format for *CEL*, titled “Soviet Music (1967/94).” My quotations are drawn from the original sources.
It is well known that the directive of artistic socialist realism resulting in music of a manufactured optimism and a false simplicity was intended to appeal to the large mass of simple people and was imposed after much discussion within the Soviet Composers Union in 1936. Many of the most talented Soviet composers like Shostakovich and Prokofiev had to give up their so called avant-garde styles at the risk of incurring utter ostracism from the society if not worse.\footnote{Elliott Carter, “Panel on Soviet Music,” May 24, 1967, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.}

Thus, from the outset, Carter places populism and artistry in opposition, implying that their talents for writing complex avant-garde music would not translate into talent for popular works. He also emphasizes that the content of this seemingly optimistic music must be false and manufactured.

For Carter, these initial harsh statements about Soviet artistic repression serve as a means to turn back to the West. He continued by pointing out that the results of American backlash against the avant-garde of the 1920s were similar, even if the means were different:

Of course, in its drastic repressive way this action paralleled a trend which had become more and more important in the West, even in our own capitalist cultural marketplace. For the American public, after being shocked by the new avant-garde works of the 20s was beginning to revolt against modernism in music in the 30s and to discourage performances of works in this style, an attitude which still prevails in many places here.

Thus, the talk begins with a parallel between official Soviet censorship and de facto American censorship. Carter then continued to lash out at the “musically and usually political conservatives” who ironically embraced the music produced by Soviet Realists to produce this American “marketplace” censorship.

Ironically the musical and usually political conservatives that formed the basis of this public attitude had to turn during these years to the Russian Socialist Realist symphonies for new repertory since very few works of this sort were being written in the United States. In the United States there has been no musical censorship except that resulting from neglect and no
reward for a serious composer commensurate with those showered on him by the Soviet Composers Union if he conformed.

Here, Carter depicts America’s unofficial censorship as potentially worse for composers because they are not even able to reap the rewards of writing a popular composition. Instead, the difference for the American composer is between “utter destitution” for writing freely and a “marginal existence” for conforming. He concluded these opening statements with a brief listing of some of the numerous composers who had been neglected in the United States:

Thus for different reasons, advanced contemporary music in Russia and the US either went underground or ceased to be composed altogether from about 1935 to 1950. The almost utter neglect of Arnold Schoenberg, Béla Bartók, Edgard Varese, Carl Ruggles, Stefan Wolpe and others in the United States during these years is in small a parallel to the violent measures taken in Russia during this time.85

While much of the talk dealt with Russian art in a more general sense, reaching beyond music, its audience would hear everything against the backdrop of American repression.

The majority of Carter’s talk focused on Russian artworks that he found influential while growing up. Eventually, he returned to the postwar era and the adoption of modern techniques by Soviet composers, which he framed as spreading from the United States through Europe:

At the end of the Second World War… there was a great change as you know that had started already in the United States before the war was finished and gradually spread to all of Europe as the various countries were liberated and there was a great resurgence of interest in the music of the so to speak avant-garde or progressive style. This spread to every part of the world.86

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
Here, Carter positions avant-garde and progressive music around the world as American in origin, a case for its celebration. When he next turned to his experiences with contemporary Soviet avant-garde composers adopting these ideas, they could be read as evidence of the success of the American cultural diplomacy efforts that sought to spread American ideals of freedom around the world. As evidence of this success he described his experience meeting Edison Denisov at the Warsaw festival in 1962. Denisov, Carter recalls, introduced himself as a twelve-tone composer and immediately brought Carter to a piano to play some of his compositions. Carter portrayed Soviet avant-garde composers, such as Denisov, as a flourishing underground community. They found airtime on European radio stations and met each other through exchanging tapes. Now, he declared they even found some acceptance by the Moscow Soviet Composers Union, which forwarded scores and recordings to Carter (something the American government would not do for him). He ended by praising the accomplishments of these composers and suggesting that in a post-Stalin Soviet Union advanced composition would continue to thrive and eventually influence the West:

These composers all seem to me to be picking up again where the Stalin period had cut them off. They are picking up the long tradition and the really wonderful things that the Soviet Union had in its early days which contributed so much to Western culture, and it seems to me that one must welcome this resurgence of interest because the Russians have something very important to contribute it has always seemed to me in this particular field, they have a kind of liveliness and kind of fantasy and a kind of vigor which is very special and very attractive and in the best works of these younger composers this is very evident to me and so therefore I end this little introduction by welcoming the fact that we have such an opportunity to hear these works and welcoming the fact that these composers are once again able to write in a way that they wish to write in and hope that they may be able to continue to hear many of their works and develop in a way that they think best.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid.}
By couching his discussion of his own influence from Russian artists, within the context of Soviet composers emerging from governmental repression, Carter makes the case that future generations of Russian composers and artists will be discussing the importance of American postwar composition as an influence, effectively arguing that this music should be better supported at home.

In his Minnesota lecture series in 1967 Carter continued to praise the development of the Soviet avant-garde, but he also began to question the motivation and purpose of audiences for this music. Instead of writing music using methods derived from American composers, Carter now saw Soviet composers developing their own even more experimental ideas:

It is certainly true that right now in the present years when there has been a kind of thaw in the Soviet Union the tendency is for the most advanced kinds of styles that have hardly reached the United States to be written by young composers. And in the countries around the periphery of the Soviet Union, dominated by them politically as in Poland there is a much greater avant-garde tendency than there is in the United States because there is a reaction against the demands of the composers union in Moscow of a kind of direct simple music that appeals to the people so that this is a very complicated process there are many kinds of threads that interrelate the public and the society with the composer and they are not the simple kinds you might imagine.88

The image portrayed here differs dramatically from his previous discussion. Now he views Soviet composers as adopting and presumably helping to create the most advanced styles of composition – perhaps feeling that they will soon come to influence American composers. Furthermore, these methods are not adopted for artistic reasons necessarily, but perhaps out of a desire to challenge Moscow-sponsored censorship.

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While in his discussion for the Soviet music panel, Carter praised the Warsaw environment, in these lectures which focused on contemporary music more broadly, he seemed more skeptical of his experience. Perhaps, he suggested, the audiences that apparently loved this new music were only there as a political statement which could not be expressed in any other way. In this sense the compositions may not be communicating anything:

This is a demonstration that they are not communist, they don’t sympathize with the Soviet Union, but then when you have Soviet composers that start to do this then you have another kind of a problem and this suddenly is something that as I say is an unexpected element of public relations. You have a house full of people in Warsaw who applaud some very way out piece and you don’t know if this is just a demonstration against the regime or not and I’m not sure the people themselves who are involved in it know. It has become a sort of standard way of behaving for Poles to become very advanced in many different fields, also in painting and they take it seriously and if you say to them isn’t this certainly a reaction against the Soviet Union they say well it might have been once but no longer do they think of it that way. Well we’ve never had this kind of a pressure and thank goodness, but therefore there’s a different kind of historic relation between the public and the music profession here, which as I say is more complicated and difficult to explain immediately.89

The Soviet avant-garde concerts in this context risk becoming a show rather than a musical event. For Carter, this proposition was highly problematic. He had no problem with music taking on political meaning and gaining political currency, but he felt that as a communicative art form that meaning should come from something within the work itself. If audiences were there primarily for the symbolism of attending a concert, the success of a work cannot be judged.

89 Ibid.
In viewing Polish concert attendance as a political act, Carter perhaps saw a merging of serial music with Cage’s aesthetics in which the concert hall becomes theater with music in the background:

I can talk about John Cage a great deal, I know him personally and we even acted in a show last year together but as far as his music goes you can see that my stand of taking the concert as a serious matter and a place where communication is possible when he does exactly the opposite and treats it as if it were a show of some kind in which music is of secondary importance it is something that simply I don’t understand, I can understand it but it’s not something that I wish to talk about, this is something that a composer is a man of conviction it takes a lot of effort to write the works that I write anyhow and a lot of conviction to do it and I refuse to consider that other people who are doing things are doing something that is more important than I am.  

Thus, we find Carter in a troubled position with regard to Soviet composers. On the one hand, he saw large attendance at concerts of complex avant-garde music in Poland. And even Russian composers, such as Denisov, had found pathways to European radio stations and diplomats who apparently supported his music enough to forward Carter scores and recordings. Meanwhile, when he was asked for more materials from a prominent Hungarian critic, he had to pay for and mail them himself, unable to access government channels. At the same time, the free market seemed to ensure that even if his audiences in America were small they were there to hear his compositions, whereas Polish audiences perhaps had no interest in the music, divorcing music of its communicative potential and turning it into a political expression outside the control of the composer.

Ibid.
Composing the Cold War Conflict

When Carter returned to America in 1965 he found an increasing demand for his participation in festivals and his appearance as a lecturer. The excitement over serial, aleatoric, and electronic compositions all of which flourished in the 1950s began to calm as they all continued to exist in their own niches alongside Carter’s “new virtuosity.” Carter’s recent works, which focused on creating a dialogue, combined a Cold War outlook, by placing the instrumental characters in opposition, with an American cultural diplomacy perspective, finding and exploiting small commonalities between the otherwise antagonistic characters. In discussing the Second Quartet at Dartmouth during his lecture series from 1963 he described his development towards focusing on opposing characters. He explained that he found a template that did not treat the quartet as an ensemble, so much as four separate individuals having a discussion, a premise that certainly would resonate with Cold War audiences:

I had thought I had written everything I could possibly think of in the First Quartet and when the commission came along to write a quartet I refused to do it for a couple of years because I thought that I had not recovered from my first one and so I put it off and I thought a lot about it and finally I came up with a work that in my opinion was a very different conception from the first one but continues the idea… It occurred to me that it would be interesting to write a work which was sort of speaking not a string quartet and that was to consider the four players as four individuals and give them their own pieces of music and, to somehow manage all this, a continuous thing in which not only were they individual works being played separately, differently, different kinds of pieces of music, but also that core combination of any little bit of what the cello might play with the violin could be made as a comment of one kind or another on the other. While the violin introduced a thing, the cello would comment in its own way on what the violin did and so forth and so that the piece was never conceived of as an ensemble work in the ordinary sense of theme and accompaniment but a conception that all these instruments were somehow related more by a kind of dialectic, by a way of discussing things.91

91 Carter pointed out that he may have known Ives’ similar quartet “Discussions,” but was unaware of it while composing and only told/reminded of it later.
He continued to explain that in constructing a form for the interactions of these different characters he was drawn to ideas of cooperation and antagonism:

Form is something that I have thought a great deal about, it conditioned the entire form of the work and the way I solved it was simply this: there had to be, every instrument had to have an appearance so to speak as a soloist in cooperation with the other instruments and also as a soloist in antagonism, contrary to those. So there was one movement for each one of the instruments in which the other instruments cooperated.

Carter concluded his introductory remarks about the quartet by presenting his conception as an entirely new approach to composition, which had to be conceived from the ground up, with no historical models:

But you see before the music was written this is the kind of thinking that went on. Sometimes I wondered whether I had been very brazen to invent this whole idea whether I could turn it into anything or not because it presented problems on every side, particularly the problem of clarity. It is extremely difficult to have very contrasting things happen simultaneously in music and the more there are, obviously four contrasting things is a great deal for anybody to hear, it’s nearly impossible to sort through a lot of it. Making all of this audibly clear and distinct was an entirely different problem than say, trying to work out accompaniment for themes and statements of themes in classical music, the problem was how to make the various isolated elements clear and yet play their role simultaneously with the other. This is a special kind of compositional problem.  

With his developments in the composition of the Second Quartet, Carter devised what he saw as a new model for his own works. While he continued his approach of reinventing his musical language in each new work with regard to rhythms, intervals, and their relationship to each other, the idea of instruments as characters interacting over the course of a work continued through subsequent compositions. In his next work, the Double Concerto, composed concurrently with the quartet, Carter expanded the range of instruments involved, while reducing the narrative to two characters. By writing the

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Double Concerto for piano and harpsichord instead of two pianos, Carter began his conception of opposition between characters with two opposing timbres. Carter then divided the instruments of the orchestra based on the differences in timbre he perceived between the two keyboard instruments, trying to group them with instruments that would complement their sounds and/or overcome their weaknesses.

Carter did not explicitly link the Double Concerto to the Cold War, but rather turned to older literary works, “De Rerum Natura” by the Roman poet Lucretius and “Dunciad” by the 18th-century English poet Alexander Pope. As with all of his literary connections, Carter did not view the composition as program music, but rather stated that he found inspiration for musical ideas in the texts. He connected the opening of the Double Concerto to Lucretius’ poem and the abstract conception of relationships between intervals and tempo, with the idea of atoms and the rate at which they fall according to the principles of atomism. As he described to Restagno:

The literary idea that turned into a compositional project was taken from De rerum natura by Lucretius. Following Lucretius’ cosmogony, I conceived the idea of sound atoms falling and forming a musical work. Since the poem ends with a description of the Plague of Athens, I also conceived a dissolution of the music that would correspond to the literary subject. I identified each interval with a given tempo, and I laid out a broad texture that would include all the intervals and their tempi…At a certain point I realized that this idea of intervals repeated at different tempi could coincide with the image of the forming of the universe as described by Lucretius.93

Lucretius’s poem provides a basis for the beginning of the composition, with its contrasting percussion rhythms, compared to the beginning of the world: “All things keep

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on, in everlasting motion./Out of the infinite come the particles/Speeding above, below,
in endless dance.”

Pope’s poem, on the other hand, allowed Carter to delve into chaos, escaping the potentially orderly world of atomism in which all things are related in their construction from the universe’s primary building blocks. The Concerto ends with a climax described by Alex Ross as “a mad, jazzy piano cadenza, spastic harpsichord, shrill brass, and furious drums” before fading out. ⁹⁴ Carter claimed inspiration for this ending in the last lines of Pope’s poem:

Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! let the curtain fall;
And universal darkness buries all.

When read in conjunction, I believe that we may interpret Carter’s construction of a narrative from the two poems as an allegory for the Cold War environment, beginning with the common roots of all things in atomism, and leading to a mock-apocalypse. Seen as the undoing of creation, this apocalypse suggests a mockery of man’s capability and constant threat of self-extinction that formed the premise for the existence of the Cold War. Schiff describes this scene as a “comic irony raised to a prophetic vision.”⁹⁵

The first two compositions of this Cold War triptych take playful and light-hearted perspectives of the Cold War, with characters such as the second violinist of the

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quartet who humorously maintains a steady pace despite the actions of everyone else, or the mock apocalypse ending the Andrew Mead’s analysis of Night Fantasies Double Concerto. The Piano Concerto takes a darker turn, reflecting Carter’s experience living in Berlin at the center of the conflict. Instead of pointing to poetry, Carter embraced Cold War language in his discussions of the piece, describing the conflict between the orchestra and piano as one between an individual and society. A celebration of the individual struggling against society had clear Cold War associations for American audiences. Furthermore the opposition between individual and society linked with his developing public persona based on the rejection of audiences, performers, and critics.

In his initial sketches from the early 1960s, Carter conceived of different types of oppositional relationships between the piano and orchestra, writing a series of contrasting characteristics under the headings: “piano states” and “orchestra distorts.”96 Carter did not envision the orchestra and piano always maintaining the same characters in this early draft, often switching a pair of adjectives: slow for the piano with fast for the orchestra then fast for the orchestra and slow for the piano, and doing the same with comic and serious. While he composed the work in Berlin the narrative took on what Shreffler and Meyer call its “‘timely’ political dimension.” They quote Carter’s own statements to Kurt Stone for Time magazine: “The piano is born, then the orchestra teaches it what to say. The piano learns. Then it learns the orchestra is wrong. They fight and the piano wins – not triumphantly, but with a few, weak, sad notes – sort of Charlie Chaplin humorous.”97

96 This approach reflects a sketch page from the unfinished Sonata for Two Pianos a decade earlier, and perhaps Carter sought to make use of some of his conception here using the resources of the orchestra to emphasize oppositional characters. See Meyer and Shreffler, 189.

97 Meyer and Shreffler, 188.
As stated in this context, the work need not be political, but could represent the relationship of a child with her/his parents as she/he comes to maturity, perhaps even reflecting Carter’s own troubled relationship with his parents. Carter, however, continued his vision by transforming the narrative into explicitly American political terms positioning the individual against society: “After one final free-for-all, the concerto ended with a quiet, reflective passage by the piano, signifying, says Carter, ‘the alienation of the individual from the misguided mass.’”

Carter had experimented with oppositional characters during the previous decades, beginning with the first movement of the Cello Sonata; however, the Piano Concerto was the first time in which the characters did not come together in some way, even if in the mutual chaos of the Double Concerto. While many saw hope for a quick end to the Cold War and the possibility of peaceful communication through music when he composed the Cello Sonata in the late 1940s, things perhaps seemed more bleak during his stay in Berlin. Carter personally struggled in Berlin to connect with local musicians, suggesting that all of the efforts to create channels of cultural communication had failed, and perhaps he really was just another line in a bureaucratic report, incapable of actual cross-cultural communication. All of this came amid watching the construction of the wall that physically prevented the cultural communication that composers had been working towards during the previous decade. Carter described to Schiff the sounds of machine-gun fire emanating from a United States Army target range near his house in Berlin, which served as a constant reminder of the continuing war that many Americans managed to escape in their daily lives. This bleak outlook may be heard in the ending of

98 “New Works: Treat Worth the Travail” Time 89, no. 2 (January 13, 1967).
the concerto, in which Carter claims to retain optimism by portraying a victory of the individual against society, by surviving a battle between life and death.99

Shortly after its premiere, the Piano Concerto became an object of governmental attention through the Diplomats’ Reading and Cultural Program, which distributed exemplary American works to international embassies and educated diplomats about the works for use in cultural diplomacy efforts. Ambassadors were sent a letter accompanying a recording of the work, which described the programmatic aspects of an individual against society (in the work that is “not mere program music”).

The Diplomats’ Reading and Cultural Program, as you know, is designed to bring you works of art particularly reflective of American society today. Due to the highly imaginative character of musical composition, such relevance is more difficult to discern than in literature, art, or the drama. Rarely does a musical work reflect so sharply the social and political atmosphere of a society as does Elliott Carter’s Piano Concerto, chosen by our Music Panel: Irving Kolodin, music critic for the Saturday Review, and Peter Menin, composer and President of the Julliard School of Music. By setting the piano solo in conflict with the orchestra, Carter has brilliantly portrayed an individual struggling against the pressing conformity of the mass. Michael Steinberg’s critical comments on the back of the album will give you an excellent feeling for Carter’s musical language.

But this is not mere program music. It has aroused excited reactions in the world of serious music. At its Boston premiere one critic called it “the most original and powerful work by an American composer. I know of nothing of comparable quality and strength to have come out of Europe since the war.”

Although critics throughout the country recognize the weight and importance of this work, they also recognize the difficulty which most people will have in approaching it. It is a tremendously complex but compelling work and certainly deserves more than one careful listening.

99 Joseph Kerman in a post-Cold War reading of the concerto argues that he hears the ending not as survival, but a second death: “The victim dies and then refuses to die, dies and is not suffered to die, survives to take new punishment. Coming after this, the second ending (it does not reclaim the pitch F) sounds to me less like a win, as Carter has suggested – somewhat doubtfully, it seems – or a hope, as Schiff suggests, than like a second dying (Joseph Kerman, Concerto Conversations [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 120-122).”
This concerto is an excellent example of the kinds of innovations being achieved with traditional instruments and musical forms. Of course, the standard romantic and classical repertoire still retains its dominance on concert programs and recordings. Even so there is a great deal of imaginative musical experimentation going on in America. We hope to show you in our future mailings what is being done with electronics and other newly devised methods of producing sound.

Furthermore, the letter explained the importance of support from private foundations, both commissioning the work and funding the recording in collaboration with the government.

Another aspect of this concerto which is becoming more and more typical of serious musical compositions in the United States is Foundation sponsorship. One foundation commissioned the work, and two other foundations, plus the federally-sponsored Arts Endowment, helped in its recording. Foundation support of serious music is becoming so prevalent in our society that some critics fear our composers are becoming too arrogant and removed from their audience. In this case the composer – who has received the Pulitzer Prize – would perhaps deny this: Newsweek once quoted him as saying, “as a young man, I harbored the Populist idea of writing for the public. I learned the public didn’t care. So I decided to write for myself. Since then people have gotten interested.” I hope you will “get interested” in the Piano Concerto as I have. I am sure you will find it greatly rewarding.¹⁰⁰

This letter and promotion of Carter’s works reveals in many ways the interconnected nature of the arts in government diplomacy programs. The diplomats celebrate the union of state and private enterprises to help Carter, the heroic individual, achieve a grand artistic accomplishment. The letter also celebrates Carter’s construction of a narrative in which he rejects audiences and performers from the Newsweek article. His independence from the public – which perhaps was only possible through the availability of government and private foundation funds, allowed him to compose in the manner that best suited him. As a result he was able to produce a piece that audiences would come to

¹⁰⁰ Alvin C. Eurich to Elliott Carter, December 30, 1968, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. This is a copy of a letter that was sent to diplomats around the world that was forwarded to Carter.
love and appreciate. This narrative, and official adoption of it, serves as an important step towards the narrative he put forth in *Flawed Words* only a few years later.

**Branding Himself an American**

At the start of the 1960s, Carter positioned himself as unique among even American composers for his emphasis on communication which could engage large and diverse audiences, rather than seeking to appeal only to the specialists of Babbitt or the spectacle seekers of Cage. By the end of the decade he retained this vision of his own compositional goals, but began to tie them increasingly to an American identity that centered on independence, freedom, and opposition to the masses, aligning with the hero of the Piano Concerto. He presented this image through his lectures on contemporary music as seen in my discussion of the Minnesota lectures in the previous chapter, a variety of magazine and newspaper articles, and ultimately through the interview autobiography *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*.

The idea of Carter’s approach to writing highly complex music that eschews serial and other prominent postwar techniques became a central tenet of the profile written for *High Fidelity* by Richard Kostelanetz, published in 1968. Kostelanetz describes Carter as a composer who rose above traditional technique, developing his rhythmic devices from reading Proust and Joyce rather than studying the music of others. Such a portrayal leads to a proclamation of Carter’s Americanism: “Carter has made several courageous leaps above the conventional ways of composing to fashion a compositional style very much his own, yet today more widely admired and, in the highest kind of flattery, often imitated by younger American composers. The question of how Carter became a great
composer deserves a profoundly American answer: he did it all by himself.\footnote{Richard Kostelanetz, “The Astounding Success of Elliott Carter,” High Fidelity (May, 1968): 45.}

Kostelanetz goes to extremes to portray Carter’s Americanism, stressing that American, rather than international, students were copying his style. In his lectures, however, Carter often pointed to his surprise about the influence of his works in Poland, and I have encountered no emphasis from Carter on American students emulating his compositions.

Carter pointed out this discrepancy in national attitudes towards his music in his comments on a draft of Kostelanetz’s article that was sent for corrections. Carter took issue with the original title: “Out of Obscurity, A New Shape to American Music,” claiming that his music should not be presented as something unknown in America, especially with his worldwide success. He even couched his argument in Cold War terms: what would the Polish audiences think to read that a composer they had loved for years was unknown in his own country where composers celebrated the freedom to write in complex styles? Carter further protested the idea that his influence be limited to American music as it was in the original title, claiming that even elsewhere in the article his influence in Europe was mentioned.

But I do not want to rewrite Mr. K’s article which is eminently readable and interesting, on a certain level. But I would like to protest the title ‘Out of Obscurity, a New Shape to American Music’. Both the first and second phrases have their problems. The first – you can understand that a Pole or a Russian reader would not get a very good impression of American musical life, if he were told that I was only just now emerging from obscurity here, after all the recognition I have received (none of which except the Guggenheim Fellowship are mentioned) both here & in Europe since the war. I enclose a very partial list up to 1960. This would be especially true of the Polish reader, for the Warsaw festival and radio has performed my music more than any other American composer with the possible exception of Varese, especially since 1960 when my 1st Quartet was performed at the festival, and especially since I have been invited to go to Warsaw by the Polish government several times from that year on.
would give the impression that the Poles recognized my importance years ago, while America was just waking up. The same is true of Russia where a record of my 1\textsuperscript{st} Quartet made its way to Kiev around 1955 and provoked an interesting correspondence. The second phrase of the title ‘a New Shape to American Music’. From my point of view, and according to what is hinted at in this article, my work gives a new shape to music – not to American music alone. This is shown by the fact of its European influence which is mentioned in the article.\textsuperscript{102}

Carter’s letter highlights the differing views of Carter’s construction of an American identity. Kostelanetz wanted to praise the American music infrastructure that allowed a composer such as Carter, who thrived on differentiating himself from other trends, to become such a powerful figure in the American composition scene. Carter, however, was interested in chastising American audiences for ignoring the domestic composers who embraced their positions as Americans and found great success as American composers abroad, but still struggled in their own nation.

As Carter’s reputation continued to grow there seemed to be increasing demand from audiences to learn more about his life and works. Originally the lectures he delivered in Minnesota were proposed with the option of publishing them as a book that included sections on his background, his compositions, and his relationship to contemporary trends and twentieth century music in general. After delivering the lectures, however, Carter felt that this project would take too much time away from composing, which at long last was beginning to pay financial dividends. As a compromise, Carter agreed to do a series of interviews with Allen Edwards, which would then be published as a book. This format provided both a sense of conversation and

\textsuperscript{102} Elliott Carter to Sherwood Harris, June 20, 1968, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung.
informality to the work, while also allowing Carter to carefully construct his thoughts on various topics through extensive revisions that Carter did in collaboration with Edwards.

In his discussions with Edwards, Carter developed the oft-repeated “to hell” statement which I discussed at the start of this chapter. As I detailed, there is little indication that he actually saw himself at the time as rejecting audiences and performers. He certainly rejected an aesthetic approach that was designed to appeal to specific sentiments associated with both the Depression/New Deal and World War II patriotism/populism, but Carter’s works in this style were rarely performed, so he lacked audiences to reject. Furthermore, he worked tirelessly after completing the quartet to find performers and audiences, fearing as he described in the initial liner notes that it would never be heard. As I have shown, Carter sent the work to numerous performers and when the Walden Quartet responded that they were interested in learning it, Carter immediately tried to use his connections to organize performances and a recording. Furthermore, from the correspondence with Harold Spivacke we saw that Carter became very upset regarding the possibility that the potential performance in Washington, DC may not come together due to his ineligibility for the Liège prize.

Carter’s statement may reflect his realization that as he developed his position within the avant-garde many listeners were drawn to his music precisely because it was so complex and difficult to approach.\textsuperscript{103} The idea of Carter as a composers’ composer had followed him since the 1956 Time magazine profile, “Elite Composer,” which began:

\begin{quote}
In the jungly world of music, there is a sort of composers' elite, whose members are deeply respected but relatively obscure. They are the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103} This idea first came up in correspondence with Joseph Kerman after Kerman’s review of the recording of Carter’s quartet. See Joseph Kerman, “American Music: The Columbia Series” \textit{The Hudson Review} 11, no. 3 (Autumn, 1958): 420-430.
composers who more often than not will be "discovered" by the public after they die, as was Béla Bartók. They get few performances because a) they write few works, b) they are constitutionally unsuited to the rigors of promoting performances, c) their music sounds forbiddingly difficult, and is twice as difficult to play. A member of this elite in good standing is Manhattan's Elliott Cook Carter, who, at 47, is just coming into his own.  

*Time* promoted Carter as a composer who “deliberately concentrates on originality instead of themes or ideas already proved,” in some regards contrary to Carter’s own frequent dismissal and criticism of what he called gimmicks, and his own desire in public talks to draw connections between his methods and various traditions. *Time* continued to position Carter as a composer for the elite, now comprised of both other composers/musicians and elite audiences, in the 1961 article “Composer for Professional!” which began quoting Lukas Foss about the Second Quartet: ‘It’s not an easy quartet to listen to’ before going on to describe the quartet’s success with the experienced new music audience of Foss’ Ojai festival and numerous awards – Pulitzer, New York Music Critics, and the UNESCO voting. The article proceeds to label Carter: “Modernist Composer Carter,” and quotes him as saying that he feels his responsibility is to the professionals rather than the public, and the professionals must “interest the world.”

Carter’s statement, amidst performances at a festival that caters to audiences looking for this sort of difficult music has a sort of irony in his rejection of audiences, by appealing directly to audiences interested in composers who write above them, and *Time*

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helps to establish this by titling of their articles as “elite” and “professional,” offering status to the fans of Carter’s music.¹⁰⁶

In *Flawed Words*, Carter continued to position himself and his current audiences as musical cognoscenti, with his compositional training allowing him to predict the taste of the future (at the time of the book present) listener:

But it was this work that really set the guidelines of what I wanted to do, and from that point on I decided that I was a composer with a training that had given me the idea of what a public could be, and had taught me to listen to the music I heard in my head the way a possible public might listen to it if it were played in a live situation. This was exactly my idea of what a composer’s training really is, or certainly should be in every case. Of course it might not be the public existing at the present time – but if a composer’s training is any good, he has the ability to hear his music as another person would hear it. So from that point on I decided that I would just write whatever interested me, whatever expressed the conceptions and feelings that I had without concern for an existing public.¹⁰⁷

Carter never intended to abandon his audience, as the earlier quotation is often interpreted. He believed that a public interested in more complex and advanced music either already existed, or would exist in the future. He probably remembered his own excitement for new compositional developments when he was a high school student.

Carter then proceeded to discuss his writing for this “imaginary” audience which would only come into existence in the future as a distinctly American possibility:

I’m aware of this when I write my pieces; but I’ve decided that the fun of composing, living as I do in America, where getting recognition is a career in itself and one which I don’t care much about, is to write pieces that interest me very much. I don’t expect them to be very successful when they’re played, but I’ve had a lot of pleasure and interest in writing them, and in a way they’ve kept me alive and interested in life, and this helps.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the continuation of this trend see Pozzi Escot, “Elliott Carter – A Forward” *Sonus* 14, no. 2 (Spring, 1994): 1-4.


He adopted an individualist stance, proclaiming that even with his arguably large audience and numerous prizes and commissions, his compositions were written for himself rather than others. As I have shown, however, Carter did not write in a vacuum, he took great care with each new piece to ensure the best possible reception, even renegotiating performance contracts to find more favorable audiences. For example, Carter rejected the planned premiere of the Piano Concerto with the Denver Symphony, insisting that the work first be performed in front of an audience who was familiar with and appreciated his earlier works.

The Edwards interview was not designed to present a mass-market (auto)biography of an important American composer, but rather to reach out to the fans who were already buying recordings and attending concerts. Evidence of its success can be found in letters sent to Carter, which praise his music by taking on the themes of individuality, freedom, and Americanism adopted throughout the book. For example Marc Hofstadter, who had recently completed his Ph.D. in literature, wrote to Carter to express his appreciation for the composer’s works after reading Flawed Words:

What I want to tell you is that of the music being written today it is yours—along, I must say, with that of Boulez—that gives me by far the greatest pleasure and enrichment. I have recordings of all your recorded works and listen to them frequently. I have my favorites—the string quartets, the harpsichord-piano concerto, the chamber sonata—but I enjoy them all. I have a little trouble with the last four works but am overcoming it; some of your comments in Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds have helped. There are many things in the pieces I love: the richness of contrapuntal texture, the subtlety and unexaggerated quality of the musical drama, the presence of tragic strength and at the same time of lyrical beauty. The simultaneity of different rhythms, and their modulation I find aurally fascinating. I like the qualities of your work that I think are American, particularly a feeling of openness and “airiness” that I get, even in some of the densest passages, as opposed to the tension of the Viennese or the tightness of the French. (I hope some day to relate your music to
some of the poetry being written recently in America.) And I believe your music makes more sense than that of other composers, those who concentrate on the moment, on a lack of movement and continuity and a consideration of music as unrelated to time. It is the music, in sum, that sounds to me the most coherently and completely conceived the most original of any music being written—and the most moving.109

Hofstadtlr presents Carter’s music as specifically American despite having only a vague sense of why he feels that way. He ends his letter reassuring Carter that now in the 1970s, the hypothetical audience constructed in *Flawed Words* does in fact exist: “and to remind you that there is a silent, insufficiently-educated but appreciative audience ‘out there.’” Carter knew that his records sold relatively well with regard to recordings of contemporary works, so there was no surprise that an audience did exist.

**The Western Hero**

By the time Carter completed and published the interview in *Flawed Words* he no longer felt a need to search for an audience. Numerous performers toured the country excited to perform his compositions, their ranks supplemented by conservatory students who embraced the challenge of works such as his timpani pieces. Recordings of his compositions sold relatively well, and he continued to accumulate numerous awards. Carter had attracted an audience throughout the country interested in his brand of complex and challenging music. He had seen this success through the promotional strategies of article writers, including the *Times* articles, Kostelanetz in *High Fidelity*, and even Salzman’s depiction of Carter both in articles and his history book. In all of these sources, the relative inaccessibility of Carter’s music became something to be celebrated and something that was distinctly American. These ideas formed the basis of the autobiographical aspects of *Flawed Words* and resulted in his statement “to hell with the

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public and performers too,” which fit in with the continued progression of his methods of self-representation.

Carter emerges from *Flawed Words* as a variant of standard narratives of the American Cold War hero. He was born into relative wealth in New York, but struck out on his own path from a young age, joining progressive musical circles dedicated to a combination of avant-garde music and mysticism. While he wanted to compose, American institutions proved insufficiently progressive for his tastes. Instead he pursued an undergraduate education in literature while undertaking further music studies in private.\(^\text{110}\) In defiance of his parents he moved to Paris, finally joining the American tradition while shunning his earlier interest in the avant-garde. Upon returning to the United States he spent approximately a decade unsuccessfully attempting to conform to a style that did not fit his tastes. Then suddenly in the deserts of the American West, Carter discovered himself and how he really wanted to compose. Only after this, when he began writing music for himself, did audiences follow.

As I have shown, this story serves as a dramatic romanticization of the actual events in Carter’s life. As Carter re-formulated his biography throughout his career, he increasingly emphasized the importance of the desert and the American West. In doing so, he drew upon another popular trope closely associated with individualism and popularized through films and stories throughout the cold War. As Henry Kissinger described himself in 1972, “I’ve always acted alone. Americans admire that immensely. Americans like the cowboy who rides all alone into the town, the village, with his horse

\(^{110}\) For a discussion of Carter’s studies at the Longy School see Wierzbicki, 13-15.
and nothing else. Maybe even without a pistol, since he doesn’t shoot. He acts, that’s all, by being in the right place at the right time. In short, a Western.”

Conclusion

Somebody like Charles Wourinen or Milton Babbitt are (sic) just completely ignored there [at Darmstadt]; they just have no presence whatsoever. Whereas here [in the USA] they are just sort of standards. And I think that was the case then [the early 1970s]. The one exception to that is Elliott Carter, who – and I don’t know quite how or why – always had strong European connections in England, in France, and in Germany.¹

As we have seen throughout this study, Carter recognized that the work of the Cold War composer lay not only in writing music and dedicating his life to his art, but also in finding effective means of presenting both the completed works and the artist. Carter never could have established the European reputation that Wolff found so extraordinary only through composing. However, issues of self-marketing and publicity were not always clear-cut. Growing up in New York, Carter attended small and often private performances of challenging contemporary music surrounded by audiences interested in these endeavors. He romanticized the role of the composer, witnessing how works by Scriabin traveled across the Atlantic to find an engaged audience in these small venues through the efforts of performers who saw their value. Throughout his career Carter attempted to balance this romantic vision of the artist devoted fully to his work, which could be disseminated by dedicated performers and audiences, with his desire to prove that composition for the concert hall, as opposed to film scores or popular music, could serve as a valid career path in contemporary America.

Carter’s career is full of these contradictions and paradoxes, from what Wolff
deems his inexplicable American/European identity and reputation to Meyer and
Shreffler’s label as a “radical traditionalist.” As we have seen, Carter embraced these
contradictions in his presentation of his works, strategically changing his methods of
presenting both himself and his works to audiences. With his late-blooming career, Carter
stood between two modes of artistic thought. Trained in the humanities of the 1920s, he
saw music as a means of communication in the tradition of great works, which held
intrinsic value for the listener. As Anthony T. Kronman describes, secular humanism of
the period thrived on “the conviction that it is possible to explore the meaning of life in a
deliberate and organized way even after its religious foundations have been called into
doubt.”2 But Carter’s career flourished in a new environment for the humanities, which
valued progress and research, emulating the sciences.

Carter discussed his preference for the broad humanistic education of composers
in his private correspondence with composers and students. While teaching at a
conservatory he admitted his preference for students who had a background in the liberal
arts, and he even recommended students attend composition programs at large
universities.3 In a draft of a letter explaining why David Schiff should be admitted to the
doctoral program at Juilliard, Carter argued that his broad-based knowledge of both
musical literature and the other arts set Schiff apart from other students in the program:

2 Anthony T. Kronman, Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the

3 In 1986 Carter was asked to serve on the board of the Journal for Musical Performance, which he was
told was being created to help bridge the gap between performers and academics. Carter responded by
writing “I was not aware that there is such a gap between academics and performers in the musical field,
having had some of the best performances of my works in Universities such as those of Michigan, Indiana,
Chicago and Kansas” (Letter from Elliott Carter to Lisa Hanford, August 27, 1986, Elliott Carter
Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung).
“he is the most interesting and knowledgeable student I have ever had, being far more familiar with the musical literature of both the present and the past, and much more articulate thoughtful and intelligent about this, and the work in the other arts than any person that has come my way at Juilliard.” Carter concludes the paragraph with the bold statement to his colleagues at Juilliard: “He is more like a composition student from the University of Michigan where almost all the interesting recent young composers have been trained.”

Meanwhile, many of his contemporaries, and the University structure around him had changed. No longer was the University a place for the study of the great works of the humanities, now it became a place of research and progress. The university composer was not necessarily responsible for creating works that communicated broadly with audiences. Modern composers, following Babbitt, could write for a class of specialists made up primarily of other professional musicians, who would have the proper training to judge the value of a new work. Supported by the University, these works could survive and thrive in a segregated marketplace outside the purview of the vast majority of classical music consumers. Carter found a part-time home in this market, but he remained determined to reach a broader audience with his music, and ultimately he was one of the most successful composers of his generation in doing so.

In my examinations of Carter’s numerous methods of self-presentation I have tried to open new paths to understanding the marketplaces of Cold War composition, while showing how Carter took advantage of many of them. Patrons took on new roles and shapes. Postwar patrons could be private, public, or somewhere in between, and their

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Draft of a letter from Elliott Carter to Peter Mennin, Elliott Carter Collection, Paul Sacher Stiftung. This draft is undated, the final letter dates June 12, 1977.
goals could vary as widely as their methods, ranging from commissioning new pieces to arranging performances, lectures, publications or recordings, or awards that would allow artists to work as they see fit. Furthermore, postwar patrons became a part of a large global network working with or responding to each other in complex ways as they tried to find a role for art and the artist in the Cold War world. These networks enabled small successes to turn into significantly larger ones, effectively allowing momentum to transform a piece from something unknown to a widely disseminated and respected masterpiece in short time. We saw this progression with Carter’s First String Quartet, as Carter effectively negotiated small victories into increasingly larger ones. The piece began as a work composed while living on a government fellowship (Fulbright). Early performances took place in University concert series, one where the performers were on faculty (Illinois) and one where Carter was on faculty (Columbia). Carter negotiated a publishing contract (American Music Publishers) and initiated talks for a recording (Columbia Records) with private companies. The quartet gained an international reputation through a contest sponsored by a foreign government (the city of Liège) in coordination with a private foundation (Koussevitzky). This led to interest by the United States government (Library of Congress), and a performance at an Italian festival sponsored by a private institution secretly funded by the United States’ government (Congress for Cultural Freedom). All of these events took place in the three years after he completed the work with no guarantee of performers or audiences.

In this study I have tried to show how Carter effectively negotiated with these institutions, recognizing their goals and seeking ways that his own career ambitions could overlap with those goals. He knew that the job of the composer only began upon
completing a piece, and he worked to ensure that the initial recognition for a piece could generate momentum towards greater heights as we saw in his letters to Harold Spivacke and Nicolas Nabokov when the Liège prize seemed in jeopardy. Future studies I expect will expand our understanding of the marketplace for new compositions and composers in the Cold War era. I have shown how one composer navigated these systems, but even Carter often failed to receive funding for many of his projects and often found his own career goals did not align properly with what was offered to him. We await a better understanding of the interaction between multiple types of patrons, and their individual decision-making processes and goals. Through such study, we will also come to a better understanding of many composers who for various reasons were lost in these bureaucratic processes.
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**Recordings**


**Film**