32. "Opinions of Some New York Leaders on Women as Orchestral Players," in *Musical Standard* 2 (April 1904), is cited on pages 332-333 in Judith Tick, "Passed Away is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870-1900," in *Women Making Music*, Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds. (Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986), 325-348.

33. Phelps, "Beyond auditions," passim.

34. Phelps, "Beyond auditions," 2.

Lia Lonnert studied harp at conservatories in Sweden and the Netherlands as well as musicology. She works mainly as a freelance musician on pedal and lever harp but also teaches harp at all levels from beginners to college students. Her harp duo, Harp Times Two, has appeared on Swedish national radio and television; her harp and guitar duo plays mainly folk music. As one of the founding members of Öresunds harpists, a Danish-Swedish cooperation, she also organizes concerts, workshops, and courses in Denmark and the south of Sweden. She is currently completing a Ph.D. degree at Malmö Academy of Music, Lund University in Sweden.

Why Probe? A Conversation

HILARY TANN AND ARTHUR MARGOLIN

The conversation between composer Hilary Tann and theorist Arthur Margolin was held between June and July of 2013. They first met as graduate students at Princeton University in the 1970s. They've maintained a forty-year friendship and continue to bat around ideas about music—how it is composed, how it is performed, and how it is heard. Hilary Tann has always viewed herself as a "nature-composer" and is beginning to wonder precisely what this might mean. Arthur Margolin finds the very idea of a "nature-composer" to be unhelpful and uninformative. The following is a lightly-edited transcript of their most recent discussion.[1]

Editor's Note to IAWM members: This informal conversation could be the first in an occasional series. You are invited to join the discussion regarding your own sources of inspiration as well as any of the topics that are raised below such as "hearing the title."

Arthur Margolin: You have, on a number of different occasions, discussed how your pieces are evoked by and composed in response to what you call "nature." In fact, you've stated that you're a "nature composer." May I respectfully submit that that epithet is not particularly helpful to me because the term seems to include just about everything and to exclude just about nothing. So what exactly are you telling me?

Hilary Tann: The first thing that occurs to me is that, as a composer, I've given you, the listener, license to be visually and referentially imaginative when you hear my music. For me, the title is very often a guide to the leading idea of the piece, and I would like the listener to enjoy the growth process while listening as much as I did while writing.

AM: It seems then that for you the seed idea for a piece of music—an auditory entity—is expressed, title-wise, using a non-auditory referent. There may be many composers that will object to that on various grounds. Most immediately I think of our teacher and friend Jim Randall, who has written a little essay called "titles," which is all about why he eschews for his pieces titles that have the slightest chance

Hilary Tann

of literal application.[2] So, you're placing yourself within a subset of composers for whom the imagery is not only non-objectionable but somehow facilitates both the compositional and listening experiences. How would you differentiate between these two different groups of composers?

HT: Two pieces come to mind. The first is explicitly programmatic—the second movement of Debussy's *La Mer*, "Jeux de vagues." I see/hear no way that Debussy was not actually sonically imitating a particular sea/soundscape when he penned the evocative opening measures of this movement. The second piece is the B-flat minor fugue theme of Bach's *Well Tempered Klavier*, Book 1, no. 22, a five-part fugue. Could anything be more formal? But when I hear the minor ninth rise to G-flat after the falling fourth from B-flat, the whole world seems unutterably sad. I can imagine using that fourth/ninth succession as part of a nature image in my own work.

AM: I asked about composers and you've responded from the vantage point of a listener, so let's go with that for now. I wonder if certain pieces, such as the Bach example, touch us deeply because they reveal to us something that we hadn't experienced before, that we hadn't even known to exist before? (Which points to the problems of using words like "sadness" to describe it, but that's a whole other topic.) I'm suggesting this is a categorically different and immeasurably richer experience than we derive from the Debussy example, in which music is imitative of known phenomena.

HT: In the mid-1980s I went to a concert that changed my life. I heard a shakuhachi master perform a *honkyoku*, one of the solo, meditative pieces, many of which contain natural references to wind, water, waterfalls. Learning these pieces opened up a whole new musical language for me.[3]

AM: But what about my question? Bach's plaintive opening miraculously creates some space that feels deep, within us, ultimately beyond words, unutterably profound. By contrast, it seems that nature-derived music is almost always like the Debussy example, and finds its apotheosis in concretions of increasing specificity, like Strauss' bleating sheep in *Don Quixote*—displays of remarkable skill to be sure, but are they not perhaps high-art novelty acts?

HT: Imitating the wind and water on the waves and all the tremulousness it suggests is a completely different level of response than simply playing at musical-photographs like a children's game. I don't make the creative journey into a particular landscape simply to imitate its surface features. The landscape is not a soundscape, though it is my hope that the landscape and *my* soundscape *will* share a deeper connection, one that will resonate with my listener, hence my title/subtitle and program note. Indeed, even if a listener has not read the program note—easy enough in these mp3 download days—I hope that s/he will "hear" the title nevertheless.

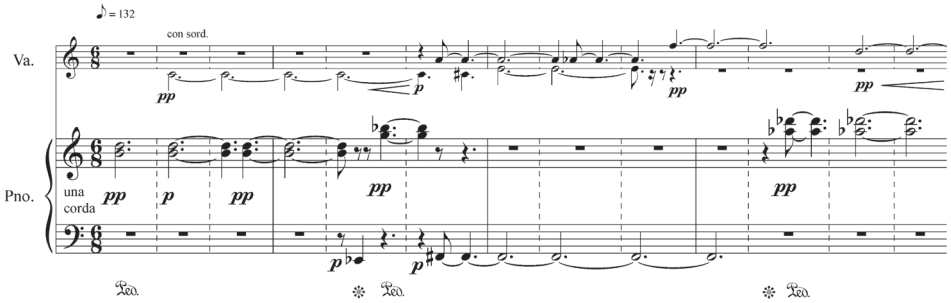
AM: I have a problem with the notion of "hearing the title." Are you saying that the meaning of your music for a listener is crucially dependent upon the—what I would consider to be—extra-musical content, imagery implied by or contained in the title? I think I'm a counter-example because I've listened to much of your music, while, I have to confess, barely attending to the titles, and have found it to be eminently comprehensible nevertheless. Was I missing something?

HT: Difficult question. At first or second hearing I imagine the piece will be heard in its own voice, carving some small niche in the continuum of your listening experiences. However, if you wanted to hear the piece as I heard it while writing it, then the title and program note would certainly come into play.

AM: I think that the idea of anyone ever hearing the piece the way a composer heard it while writing it is not just conceptually incomprehensible but also empirically meaningless. I don't think the abstractions from our stream of consciousness that we call "experiences" are actually sharable, on either psychological or philosophical grounds[4] (despite the fact that they're usually pegged to mutually observable external events, at least in principle; otherwise we could be describing something rather disconcerting).[5] Your idea of the way your titles can function seems to way over-determine people's interpretation of those words. Besides, even if listeners did have a similar experience as yours, you're never going to know about it—after all, you don't interview each listener after the concert. So, I'm wondering if the idea of listeners "sharing" your experience, with the implication that you might be "inducing" such an experience in them, is an instance of a not unfamiliar brand of megalomania that many artists seem to be prone to, however gentle the impingement in your case.

HT: When I *talk* about my music I'm most often talking with performers. During the rehearsal process many performers respond well to my descriptions of moments of continuity with reference to the "underlying, often nature-derived, subtext" (to use your terms). An example: a recent piano trio (*…slate, blue-gray*), where I wanted the string figuration to suggest that the piano lines were "underwater." In rehearsal, all I had to do was to give the performers this idea, and the soundscape of the piece immediately became vivid. Now, I had already clearly marked the passage dynamically to reveal this, but only when I gave the *reason* and *word-image* did the trio's sound-image capture what I had wanted to convey.

AM: I think the kind of discourse the composer enters into when interacting with the producer of her/his music is full of distinctions, hints, metaphors, etc. that are not practicable to convey statically in a one-way piece of writing by you to the seated listener. But in response to my listener-oriented question you spoke about performers, and I'm wondering if that reflects not evasion on your part, but is symptomatic of our different perspectives and beliefs.



Ex. 1. Expanded version of measures 1-4 of Milton Babbitt's *Composition for Viola and Piano*.

HT: We do have different perspectives and beliefs. How could it not be so? I'm a composer dealing in possible futures and sometimes the void; you are a philosopher/theorist, dealing in the multifaceted nature of the already-created. (**AM:** Touché!) However, there's another dichotomy. I've noticed that some performers get somewhat irritated with my "nature-speak." They say "simply tell us – do you want this louder or softer?" And I have a problem answering them. I want to say, play it just loudly enough to stand out in this landscape, but do not put yourselves center-stage, do not orate, do not give speeches. For me as a composer the notational language of music is not sufficiently precise. Even Bach relied on a shared wealth of *affect* to carry his music forward.

AM: I have to admit that what I find most troublesome about your view is the usurpation of specific musical qualities of the piece of music with generic nature-derived imagery. When I listen to a piece of music, I want to revel in its uniquely constructed, and engendered, auditory qualities. So I wonder how some imagery, of say, a granite cliff, which seems (excuse me) rather commonplace, is going to in any way enhance my reception of that music. As a musician, I'm alive to the particularities of sound in music, but I have no special abilities as a viewer, or imaginer, of granite cliffs. Why should the ordinary attenuate or even supplant what is to me the extraordinary? (**AM** to **HT**: I think this is the crux of the matter.)

HT: OK, the "granite cliff" refers to my piece *Nothing Forgotten*, specifically to the first movement subtitled "as if the granite were some half-forgotten spirit."[6] There's no way I'd have composed *this* piece without *that* title—the *ff* fifths of the opening (one side of the granite gorge), the folk-like inner section (the inhabitants with their history of loss), and the *pp* return to the "half-forgotten spirits" of the other side. Notice that my titles and subtitles are most often drawn from a poet's view of nature—one that has already been compressed and yearns for expansion. Furthermore, I notice that I'm the type of person who collects rocks, and grasses, and minutiae… all of which carry a *sense of place* within them. In my daily life, almost all objects around me "have meaning." But I also note that there are those for whom a rock is simply that—perhaps clutter—and

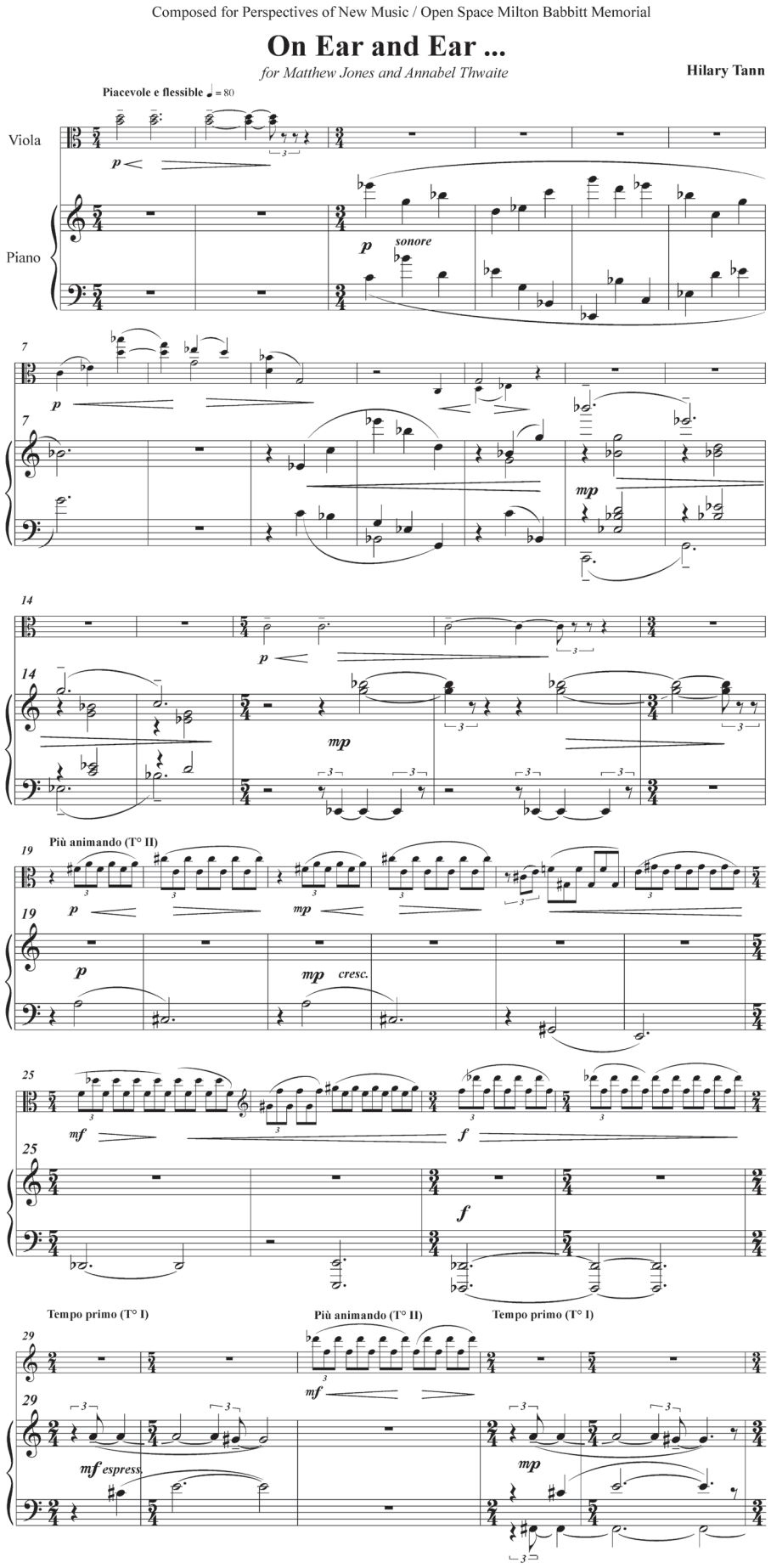
a particular walk is just exercise. I guess I'm talking about what haiku poets would call "the interconnectedness of things," a concept deeply embedded in the Zen-based view of the world. For those of us who see the world this way, titles carry freight way beyond their surface meanings. The title contributes to what is particular and unique in the piece. It is the lens through which the piece may best be heard. I judge my own work by its faithfulness to this vision, and I expect to be judged by others in this way. What is dull and ordinary to you is vital and extraordinary to me.

AM: That's an astonishing statement!—that the "validity" and "worth" of your music, for you, is founded on how an unaccountably diverse group of anonymous others perceives it, or more accurately, alleges how they have perceived it. Moreover, all this rests on a title you've affixed to it, whose interpretation by anyone in particular you'll never know. I must admit this sounds like a most painful path to self-validation. How is the ascertainment of these experiences supposed to take place?

HT: As the composer, I guess I must assume that my "hypothetical other" (the one for whom I write, in Stravinsky's words), to whatever extent, shares at least that part of my world view.

AM: I gained a bit of insight into Messiaen's music, and maybe why I sometimes have problems with it, when I read that he was a synaesthete—he perceived sounds also as colored lights. He might have said, somewhat as you do, my music exists on two planes, one for those who perceive sound as sound, and the other for those who perceive, in addition, sound as color. The latter group will have immeasurably richer experiences when listening to my music. Is it possible that you are ideally writing music for people who have particular neurological wiring such that visual or other imagery elicit auditory sensations, and the intermingling of these sensations with the sounds of your music is what gives it its unique voice? And are the rest of us, by implication, going to fail to hear what's truly special in your music?

HT: Not *auditory* sensations, but, yes, sensations. As I said earlier, a sense of "the interconnectedness of things." Some years ago a violist told me that playing my music was like "being in a landscape." I cannot imagine a more appropriate response to



Ex. 2. Hilary Tann: *On Ear and Ear*

what I am trying to do. In the words (which I've set) of Welsh poet R. S. Thomas, "It was like a church to me/ I entered it on soft foot,/ Breath held like a cap in the hand./ It was quiet." (*The Moor*).[7] This reverential, even sacred, sense of "nature" is like the "nature" of the development section of the first movement of Beethoven's Sixth. In musical terms, it is a language of slow evolution, substantive silence (*ma*),[8] a respect for the DNA signature of the smallest musical ideas (simple triads in Beethoven's case), a wave-like rise and fall of smaller and larger formal elements (the *jo-ha-kyû* curve of the Japanese aesthetic).

AM: Let's say that you have before you an eager soon-to-be-listener to one of your pieces, who has read, or has been told, your nature-derived title. What are the mental operations you would want this listener to execute in the presence of your music?

HT: Two years ago I was asked to contribute a piece to the Milton Babbitt Composers' Memorial in *Perspectives of New Music / Open Space*.[9] At Princeton I gained a great deal from studying with Milton Babbitt. Now, as a composer with a fully-developed, non-serial, nature-derived syntax, how was I to honor Babbitt's life's work? In the end I took the first four measures of his early combinatorial 1950 *Composition for Viola and Piano* and slowed down the durations of the opening (quarter note, dotted-half note). At this speed, the piece did not sound so crunchy but contained, to my ear, winning thirds. Further, the *pp-p-pp* dynamics of Babbitt's first measure, although compressed, suggested a wave-like crescendo and decrescendo, especially when transcribed for viola. Here was a sound-image with movement, something I could relate to.

I recalled that Babbitt himself had set the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins (one of my favorite poets). The opening of Hopkins' sonnet "The Sea and The Skylark" came to my mind: "On ear and ear two noises too old to end/ Trench—right, the tide that ramps against the shore; ...Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,/ His rash-fresh, re-winded new skeinèd score...." Now I could begin writing. I had my "resonant image." The wave-shapes ebb and flow in the phrase-structure of the piece, the sea (piano) underlies the skylark (viola), a succession of "low lull-off" waves are answered by higher and higher "crisps of curl." The musical language itself owes much to Babbitt's slowed-down minor-third-based opening, and the result is my own composition, an homage titled *On Ear and Ear*. (See Examples 1 and 2.) Some listeners will delight in Babbitt's original score, some will hear the slowed-down version as "easier," and some will enjoy my wave and skylark. I can only write from what works for me as a source of inspiration—the rest is up to the performer and listener.

AM: So for you a nature-derived image is an indispensable pre-condition for writing a piece of music.

HT: Yes, *absolutely*.

NOTES

1. The dialogue is a greatly expanded version of "Why Probe?" written for *New Music Connoisseur* 21.1 (Fall 2013).

2. James K. Randall, "titles," CD liner notes, *ars antiqua, a garland of midi, Open Space* 22.

3. Hilary Tann, "Coming to Terms: *(Futaiken) Reibo,*" *Perspectives of New Music* 27.2 (Summer 1989): 68-69.

4. Cf. Benjamin A. Boretz, "The Universe of One, And, the Music of the Other," *The Open Space Magazine* 15/16 (Fall 2013/Winter 2014): 208-218.

5. Arthur Margolin, "Personifications," *The Open Space Magazine* 12/13 (Fall 2010/ Winter 2011): 208-218.

6. Hilary Tann, *Nothing Forgotten* (piano trio), *Millennium Overture*, North/South Recordings 1027; also, *Songs of the Cottom Grass*, Deux-Elles DXL 1132 (2008); score, Oxford University Press, 1999.

7. Ronald Stuart Thomas, "The Moor," *Collected Poems 1945-1990*, Phoenix Press (1966); also, Tann, *The Moor* (treble choir), Oxford University Press, 1998.

8. Tania Cronin and Hilary Tann, "Afterword: Tôru Takemitsu with Tania Cronin and Hilary Tann," *Perspectives of New Music* 27.2 (1989): 212-213.

9. Hilary Tann, *On Ear and Ear*, Supplement with CDs: "Milton Babbitt: A Composers' Memorial," *Perspectives of New Music* 49.2 (2012): 313-325.

Arthur Margolin earned a PhD in Music Theory from Princeton University, where he studied with Jim Randall, Milton Babbitt, and Benjamin Boretz, whom he first met as an undergraduate at New York University. He is currently retired and lives in the south of England with his wife Kelly and housemaster Frederick, an eleven-year-old cockapoo.

Welsh composer Hilary Tann lives in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York, where she is the John Howard Payne Professor of Music at Union College. She was composer in residence for the Eastman School of Music Women in Music Festival in 2011 and Women Composers Festival of Hartford in 2013. Website: hilarytann.com

It's Time for Another SONG JAM!

JESSICA L. PAUL

SPREADING THE WORD
(and the MUSIC)
Come join us for our next SONG JAM!
You knew it was coming...
It's time for another SONG JAM!
A nifty way to get some new repertoire ideas, hear good performances, chat with some new friends,
AND
earn a recital credit!
For heaven's sake, BE there.
And bring a friend.

The idea for the SONG JAM began to percolate at the end of my second sabbatical in 2006, by which time I had acquired a considerable amount of music written by women composers. As a collaborative pianist and vocal coach of many years, I had learned, performed, and taught a large amount of vocal and chamber music, but—partly by virtue of my vocation and partly due to my accommodating personality—my repertoire had always been of someone else's choosing. I was, to put it bluntly, paid to learn the music that was put in front of me—always an exciting challenge, certainly, but one that involved no imagination on my part. It was not until the late 1990s that the works of female composers began to appear on my doorstep with more frequency, and, as a result, my own curiosity in these composers began to grow. These two, semester-long breaks from my teaching position here at Luther College offered me the perfect opportunity to take control of my life, so to speak, and to begin my own search for women composers and their music.