

VI. Quiet Fan for Erik Satie and Hey When I Sing These Four Songs Hey Look What Happens

These two pieces, written between the end of 1970 and March, 1972, are the incipients of a new period for Tenney. Having just left N.Y., and taken a job at California Institute of the Arts, he perhaps felt it necessary to make certain changes in his musical personality. One very important development was a new aversion to things electronic, and a renewed interest in instrumental music, and he has not since used electronics in his music (except for the use of some simple tape delay in Saxony, the Harmonia, and Symphony). Tenney's main interest in technology since that time has been in the use of the computer for analytical and compositional purposes.

This aversion to electronic music was, I think, part of a larger effort to imbue his music with a greater simplicity, and to introduce softer and more human elements. At about this time, Tenney also "discovered" the work of Conlon Nancarrow (and has remained one of Nancarrow's more important advocates to this day), and it is curious that though he eschewed that kind of dramatic and mechanical complexity in his own work (except for perhaps Spectral Canon and the Pieces for Mechanical Drum) Tenney became very interested in it in the work of another composer. However, Quiet Fan and Hey When I Sing..., and the several pieces that follow are an attempt on his part to explore the intricacies of a quieter, simpler music, and to integrate these with his own radical change of habitat, situation and perception. It may well be that Tenney is responding with particular sensitivity to his environment and change of times, or to the new influence of people like Harold Budd and Jerome Rothenberg, to name just two who had seriously explored a quieter, less assuming style in music and poetry. In any case, in these pieces we can see a clear stylistic break in the evolution of Tenney's musical development.

Quiet Fan for Erik Satie is scored for english horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, trombone, flute, alto flute, oboe, violin, viola, 'cello and bass. It is possibly the longest instrumental piece Tenney had composed up to this point, but in its very simple and direct form, it has much in common with many of his previous pieces. The idea is simple: beginning with the minor second (B above middle C, to C above that), the intervals gradually "fan out" in half-steps around this center, to the major tenth, and then close back. (Example VI.1 shows the range of the fan). This happens several times over the course of the piece. Example VI.2 shows a few selected measures of this process in one instrumental pair. Orchestrationally, it is a little more complex, with various instrumental "echoes" and doublings (note the violin and oboe in Example VI.3).

Example VI.1



Example VI.2



Example VI.3



The piece is clearly sectional (see Example VI.6 for a "graph" of the piece). The first complete "unfolding" of the fan, up to A (measure 65), uses only the higher strings, flutes, clarinets, oboe and english horn. The oboe and english horn alternate throughout, a measure apart and in canon with the clarinets, and after a few measures the flutes and soon the strings enter with the melodic figure in rhythmic delay (refer again to Example VI.3), producing a soft texture of quiet, repeated attacks. This texture continues up to measure 65, at which point the lower instruments (bass, 'cello, trombone and bassoon) enter with long, sustained pedal points at the enharmonic G# (lower "edge" of the fan). The pedal is maintained until measure 125. The remaining instruments begin "closing in" the fan in the same manner as before, except that the meter change at A (from 3+3+2/8 to 3+3/8) results in a shortening of the durations (Example VI.4 shows several rhythms before and after). The general dynamic level increases from  $p < mp > p$  to  $mp$ .

At B, (ms. 125), the fan begins to open up once again, with another new meter (2+3/8) with proportionally altered durations. At this point, the bass line begins to move slowly, in three measure durations. According to Tenney, the particular selection of pitches in the basses was determined mostly by ear, in an attempt to fill out the resulting chord in a way that would "sound like Satie's harmonies". This often results, as in the first five or six notes, in some pitch a fifth below one of the fan's outside pitches, and because of the ever-present B-C in the top voices, the major seventh sonority is predominant (as in Milk and Honey). The glissando down to the low E in the basses at measure 125 comes as a wonderful surprise after several minutes of interrupted minimal activity. Once more, the dynamics increase:

$mp < mf > mp$

Example VI.4

The musical score for Example VI.4 consists of four staves: English Horn (E.H.), Oboe, Violin (Vln.), and Viola (Vla.). The top staff (E.H.) has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff (Oboe) has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The third and fourth staves (Vln. and Vla.) have a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two sections by a box labeled 'A'. The first section is in 3+3+2/8 time, and the second section is in 3+3/8 time. Handwritten annotations include '(ms. 63)' at the beginning, '(p)' and '(mf)' above the first staff, and '(pp.)' below the second staff. The score shows melodic lines for the upper instruments and a more active bass line in the lower instruments.

At C (ms. 170), the tempo is increased by a factor of 5/4 (to  $\overline{4/8}$ ), and as the fan closes up once again, with a decrescendo in dynamic level to

*p* < *mp* > *p*

the bass, which had up to this point been quiet (*p*), crescendos suddenly to forte and then back down to mezzopiano, announcing the new section. The vertical density increases slightly, with the low winds having fewer measures of rest, but otherwise nothing else changes. Tenney is gradually and subtly increasing the rate of movement, through tempo changes and slight polyphonic density increases (like the introduction of movement in the low instruments at B). Around ms. 179, a noticeable accelerando and crescendo begins to occur in the basses, with successive shortening of durations. At D (ms. 197), the basses are heard as a melodically ascending line up to the work's big surprise quote section (ms. 200 through 211 where the quote finally disintegrates), comprised of loud musical references from Satie interspersed with the previous soft texture. The quotes are based on the well known tune from Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear, which Tenney had performed in N.Y.C. with Philip Corner. Example VI.5 is an excerpt from this section. This short passage is one of the more memorable in all of Tenney's music, both because of the skill in which the fabrics and melodies are interwoven in an Ivesian fashion, but also for the wonderful audacity of placing the quotations right in the middle of this almost hypnotic context. The quote takes place during the final closure of the fan. At the next section, E (ms. 215), the meter changes again to 2+3/8 (this time the durations are augmented as the volume increases to

*mp* < *mf* > *mp*

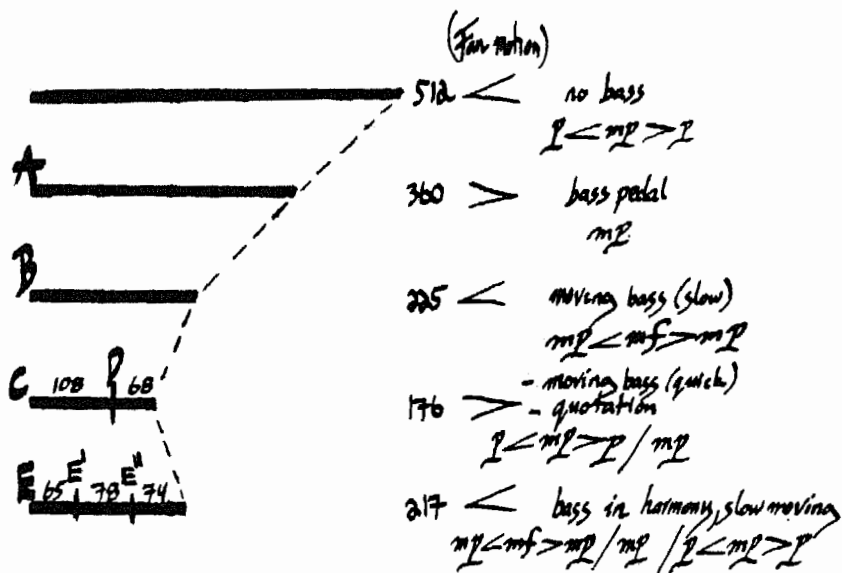
once again) and the fan begins to open again. For the first time, the bass instruments play in a harmonic fashion,

Example VI.5

mostly thirds with each other, and so this closing section is vertically quite rich in comparison to the rest of the piece. The meter and durations gradually increase in accelerated retrograde of the first half of the work (2+3/8 at ms. 215; 3+3/8 at 227; 3+2+3/8 at 239 until the end), as the volume gradually decreases to its initial level. The piece ends on the chord Eb-B-C-G# (alternating minor sixths) in the top voices and a partially enharmonic Ab-C-Eb in the lower (the resultant a Rugglesian major triad with a minor third added).

The temporal form of the work can be seen at a glance in Example VI.6. Note that, until the last, each successive opening or closing of the fan is shorter, and so the overall structure is in itself a kind of closing in, and then opening near the end, or a higher level fan. The numbers in the

Example VI.6



example (VI.6) indicate the number of beats (an eighth equals approx. 104, making the total length a little over 14 minutes). We can see as well that there is an overall dynamic "envelope" over the piece (<>) which also is self-replicating at lower levels (as in the last section).

In Quiet Fan, we can see clearly Tenney's interest in careful, consistent hierarchical structuring of simple processes, not unlike his formal procedures in the computer works. Like a large snowflake, Quiet Fan can be seen to have the same shape in several levels of detail. It is a more complex work, upon inspection, than I'd thought after an initial hearing or two, and its particular place in the chronology and history of Tenney's music reveals much about the development of many of his musical ideas and techniques.

Hey When I Sing These Four Songs Hey Look What Happens, (SATB), is my personal favorite of Tenney's music, and in many ways it is one of the simplest pieces he has written. It is also one of the most joyous, and it contains many of the more interesting characteristics of all his work: a stripping away of unnecessary dramatic materials to produce an even greater, starkly dramatic effect; a very simple and predictable form; and the probing, sensitive, and imaginative use of indigenous materials.

The whole score is printed in Example VI.7. Analytically, only a few things need be said aside from the fact that it deserves to be performed more often (I don't know of any recent performances). The technical aspects of the rhythm and melody are similar to much of his later work: the rhythms are derived from the natural speech rhythms (this may be most clearly seen in the last line of the basses), and the pitch materials are derived from a limited set, a pentatonic closely related to the harmonic series (in this case: C-D-E-G-Bb, or 1,9,5,3,7 - the first five odd numbers of the harmonic series). This latter is a simple, early usage of the type of harmonic thinking that would become the predominant tonal theme in virtually all of his later music. The "swell" and "clang" ideas are also present here, in the sustain and phrasing of the upper voices from the initial attacks of the bass.

I cannot overstate the need to hear this short but powerful work - music more illustrative of James Tenney than any analysis or description could ever aspire to be.

Example VI.7

*Hey When I Sing These 4 Songs Hey Look What Happens*  
 (the text is a translation from the Iroquois by Jerome Rothenberg)

$\text{♩} = 112$

James Tenney  
1971

S/A *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f*  
 4 hey ----- hey ----- (ce...) yeah yeah so strong  
 8 (vibrato!) (almost a shout) (ord.)  
 T hey! hey! (ce...) yeah! yeah! so strong  
 B hey when I sing hey ----- it can help her yeah it can yeah it's so strong

S/A *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f*  
 4 hey ----- hey ----- (ce...) yeah yeah so strong  
 8  
 T hey! hey! (ce...) yeah! yeah! so strong  
 B hey when I sing hey ----- it can raise her yeah it can yeah it's so strong

S/A *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f*  
 4 hey ----- hey ----- (ce...) yeah yeah so strong  
 8  
 T hey! hey! (ce...) yeah! yeah! so strong  
 B hey when I sing hey ----- her arm gets straight-er yeah it can yeah it's so strong

S/A *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *ppp* (2nd time only)  
 4 hey ----- hey ----- (ce...) yeah yeah so strong  
 8  
 T hey! hey! (ce...) yeah! yeah! so strong  
 B hey when I sing hey ----- her body gets straight-er yeah it can yeah it's so strong



Note: tenors and basses sing each line through twice; sopranos and altos join in the second time only.

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