

## Preface

James Tenney's work, as a composer, theorist, performer and teacher, is of singular importance in American music of the last twenty-five years. He is by nature a quiet, almost publicity-shy musician, but his musical and theoretical works are steadily becoming widely known, despite the fact that few have been published and almost none, to this date, have been recorded on disk. META/HODOS seems to have the widest "underground" readership of any treatise of its kind, although it has never appeared in print in any readily available form. The drum quartets, For Ann (rising), and a few other works are also familiar, in a wide variety of contexts, to contemporary musicians. However, general knowledge of Tenney's total oeuvre, and of the integrities found therein (to borrow a term from Fuller, in whose work Tenney has always been interested) is at best spotty. To some, Tenney is known as one of the first composers to successfully make use of the digital synthesis techniques developed by Max Matthews at Bell Labs, and to make these ideas known to the music world. He is also known for his groundbreaking work in the development of compositional algorithms. To others, he is the pianist who plays the Concord Sonata so wonderfully from memory, and who, as a conductor and pianist has long been a courageous pioneer and advocate of contemporary music, particularly American. He is known solely as a theorist to some, and as a composer to others. Very few have the opportunity to appreciate the "complete" James Tenney, and I intend this current effort as a small token toward this end..

In my attempt to provide an overview of the music and the theoretical works of Tenney, several disclaimers need to be made. First, time and space permit only brief analyses/descriptions, even of major works. It is my hope that these small introductions will stimulate further consideration of this music. I am painfully aware that because most of these works have not been discussed in print, and few musicians are familiar with the majority of them, much of what I have to say might prove in some ways incomplete and even slightly inaccurate, or at best only a part of the story. Yet, since I believe that a sincere first effort is both necessary and better than none at all, I have simply tried to include much of what I know or can determine about some of these works. Second, much of the music is not recorded. Of those recordings that do exist, (due to performance or recording problems), few are adequate representations of the music. In many cases, we have only our eyes and imagination (but not our ears!) to make use of when considering the pieces. Once again, I hope that this brief essay might stimulate more frequent and careful performances of Tenney's work. Tenney's own strong critical and analytical abilities make him the best authority on these works, and though he has been generous and detailed in explaining

many of the musical ideas to me, my own understanding remains at best that of a careful, interested and educated listener. It would indeed be a wonderful thing to read Tenney's analyses of his own music some day; something which we have all had a taste of in his published remarks on Ives, Nancarrow, Ruggles, Varèse, and others.

Third, Tenney is still a young composer, and quite prolific. His output of the last twenty years will probably require another twenty before its historical and musical significance is properly appreciated. I have tried to confine my comments mainly to the descriptive, and to avoid historical and critical conclusions as much as possible. Yet the reader will no doubt sense quite quickly my admiration for the man and his work, and my feelings that the work represents a musical statement of unique importance in the latter half of this century.

"I know nothing I can say about any of these pieces can possibly replace the extraordinary experience of listening to them, but I shall try,..., to communicate some of my own observations, impressions, thoughts and feelings, in a way that may make it easier for others to 'hear into' the music." (From Tenney's introduction to his article on Nancarrow)

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James Tenney himself has been careful and quick to respond to my various questions and requests, except to the one that he refrain from composing any new works until the article was completed.

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