

Polyphony & Complexity

New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century

Published in Collaboration with the
Gesellschaft für Musik und Ästhetik

Edited by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf,
Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig

Volume I

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bludenzer tage zeitgemäßer musik

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Foreword

Polyphony & Complexity is the first volume in the series *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century*. The main goal of this series is to offer a platform for the publication of texts concerning significant new developments in the musical arts, the aesthetic problems they raise, and their place in the culture of this new century. The primary focus—which is explicitly international—will be on innovative composers/creative musical artists of the middle and younger generations. Included will be work-presentations, analyses, and theoretical and speculative texts on subjects such as compositional technique, issues of performance practice, and questions concerning perception, reception, and meaningful interpretation of this music.

This first volume in the series grew directly out of the *Polyphony & Complexity* Festival at the 1998 *bludenzner tage zeitgemäßer musik*. The issue of complexity in music has aroused both great interest and controversy over the last two decades, primarily due to the substantial new challenges that “complex” music has posed. However, since Richard Toop’s pioneering article “Four Facets of the ‘New Complexity’” (1988) and a subsequent symposium at the 1990 Gaudeamus Festival, serious and well-grounded discussions of this issue have since been in short supply. It was hoped that by bringing this theme into relationship with one of those aspects most inseparable from the historical development of Western music—namely, polyphony—a fruitful exchange of ideas could take place. Thus, a number of younger composers from Europe and the U.S.A., whose complex scores had recently been the occasion of heated discussion, were invited for presentations and performances of their works. In parallel, leading early music groups were invited to present and perform complex works from earlier ages, such as those from the little-known *Baldwine Manuscript*, the *Trentino Codex*, and the *Ars Subtilior* master Matteo da Perugia. A primary aim was that the confrontation of works of extreme complexity from different eras might provide a background for and perhaps illuminate more recent developments. Both the lectures and the creative exchange of ideas at this festival, as well as further discussions and a subsequent international call for papers led to the conceptual framework of the present book.

Because the subject matter of this volume unavoidably impinges upon professional disciplines such as musicology and music theory, the following must be emphasized. Although great efforts were made to maintain the highest possible scholarly standards (such as those of factual accuracy), and although well-grounded experience with historical musics forms the basis of the broader historical assertions found within, the main aim of this book is clearly not academic in nature, especially not in the sense of a mimicking of methodologies found in the “hard” sciences. Rather, this entire enterprise tends in a more speculative direction: it consists of the attempts of creative artists and thinkers to come to terms with pressing and substantial aesthetic questions, these

demanding creative interactions both with the present and with tradition, i.e., with that which has been handed down to and “pre-forms” the present. It would be absurd to appraise these efforts solely according to the criteria of verifiability and/or falsifiability. Instead, considered judgment is required, this on the basis of more indefinite standards such as aptness, compellingness, and originality.

A second clarification is also in order: that, despite the consistent focus on a common theme, no unified viewpoint is presented in this first volume—indeed, that there are often clear disagreements between contributors—was not viewed as a shortcoming, but rather as a strength. The fact that such a broad diversity of viewpoints could be found among composers so often indifferently lumped together under the “complex” label is a sign that complexity is less a specific style or set of methods than—perhaps—a condition of modern-day creative thought, at least that which is oriented toward attaining fundamentally new expressive forms.

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The Editors

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