

erty whose shape has not changed much for the past half-century or more. And although a few composers have undertaken experiments in the realm of tone color – notably through extended instrumental and vocal techniques, invention of new instruments, and electronic music – the timbral norms of academic new music have remained substantially those associated with the instruments of the traditional orchestra, which has expanded in size but not changed much in a structural and organizational sense for over two centuries.

The realm of popular music is considerably less insulated than that of modern art music. In the Western world, a decisive musical development of the twentieth century has been the rise to prominence of a spectacular variety of Afro-American musical genres and associated styles: ragtime, big-band jazz, be-bop, and rhythm and blues, the development leads from rhythm and blues directly into the rock'n'roll of the 1950s and the subsequent stylistic explosion. Rock music exists in an abundance of varieties, many of them drawing their vitality from fresh infusions of non-Western sources. On the face of it, there might appear to be considerably less pressure to conform within the realm of popular music than in the realm of modern art music, more incentive to innovate, to create hybrid musics, to experiment along the border lines between genres, and indeed a great deal of such experimentation has been done. But as any popular musician can testify, the pressure to conform in the world of popular music comes from a different direction – not from the academic imperative of upholding a tradition of supposed structural sophistication and intellectual validity, but from the need to make music that is “commercial.” Group after group has died from a creative standpoint after making one or two albums that attain commercial success: having come up with an original sound, the musicians – and especially the musicians’ management and record company – are reluctant to alter the formula in significant ways in subsequent efforts for fear of loss of audience and income. Few have the courage to escape this trap and follow their artistic destiny.

The situation is thus simultaneously exhilarating and perilous for the contemporary musician who finds something valuable and important to say. Finding or creating an audience is only part of the problem. The musician must also find the strength to resist both intellectual and commercial pressures. What a paradox: the global musical/informational network allows access to fantastic riches in terms of sources, ideas, and styles, but simultaneously, old and new institutions – existing performance groups, genre-associated audiences, the academy, the music industry – may inhibit the musician from forging anything truly new out of these precious materials.

Eno’s music, in its sweeping eclecticism, represents – one might even say epitomizes – the new freedom felt by many younger composers in the second half of the twentieth century – composers for whom the traditional forms, forums, and aesthetic and intellectual ideals of Western art music have never had any particular precedence over those of other kinds of music. The difference between classical music and popular music presents itself to Eno as a matter of differing forms of social organization and performance practice, not as a matter of degrees of craft and aesthetic worth. In Eno’s music we find qualities that are commonly, if somewhat superficially, associated with art and popular music respectively: on the one hand, a genuine concern for values of thoughtfulness, reflection, craft, creativity and originality, on the other hand, an acknowledgement of the needs of the audience, a sense of music as a functional, social phenomenon, and a lively interest in the full global spectrum of contemporary musical styles and tendencies.