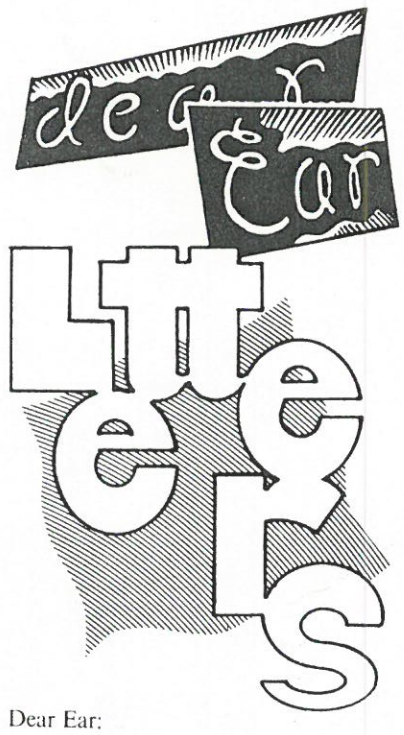
EAR 1/3 Voice & Music
4/5-81



Dear Ear:

Congratulations on your issue concerning the theme of music and politics. This is an area which I believe is going to reach all active musicians in industrialized societies in due time. As so terribly little is published in the United States on this subject, it was good to see a launching of the discussion. Actually subjects is more apropos as the political input in music can be viewed from many angles as was certainly demonstrated by the diversity of articles. I would like to offer a couple of reactions to the issue as I fear some points were only tangentially focused upon and a few others somewhat dubiously.

To begin, it surprised me that not one writer took the trouble to try to summarize the various ways in which music and politics are related. Instead, each writer reflected on music and politics which sometimes became confusing. I believe that one can approach the subject from four general categories:

1) Politics in music as organized sound, i.e., can a piece really be communist in terms of compositional techniques, or is it a culture which imposes a certain symbolism to the piece?

2) Politics in music-making. Here one refers to the interrelationships of musicians and composers in terms of political processes. How democratic is improvising after all?

3) Politics in terms of society and its music. This is obviously the most tangible question. It concerns the place of music in society, the funding of the music-makers, and the application of a society's politics in the musical milieu (see 1).

4) Politics of the composer. This point, which was hardly touched upon, is actually what interests me the most. In a pluralistic world, what do musicians try to reach with their music? The composer's choice of a theory/aesthetic is a political decision even, as Tom Johnson points out, when one has no specific politics in mind.

Let me elaborate on these points.

1) I believe Richard Hayman is completely correct is stating that it is rarely sound which makes a political statement. I think of Ligeti's remarks published in the "Darmstädter Beiträge" XII. He spoke of a royal Rumanian hymn, written by a commissioned Austrian composer, which he knew from childhood. Later as the somewhat reactionary Rumanian government was replaced by a socialist one, this hymn was banned. However, by some evolutionary process, the music still continued to exist with another text as an Albanian song of struggle! This song has now become the Albanian national anthem. In other words, a text can obviously inject a political vision into music, but not necessarily the sounds themselves. The way in which African drumming ensembles work is a political process, the sounds they create are a reflection thereof, but are in themselves not specifically political. They can only be related to their makers and the society to which they belong.

2) Concerning the politics of music-making, one must be extremely careful in making judgments. It all boils down to the place of music in the various societies (see 3). The interrelationships between musicians is dependent on this. We Westerners have no right to project our values on other societies. Therefore, all-encompassing remarks on musicians and politics are most difficult.

For example, although most of Gregory Sandow's comments touched home, his questioning of the democracy of improvisation led, at least in my case, to misunderstanding. He was specifically correct in claiming that the composer should not call the improvising of his or her own composition a democratic process, for indeed it is likely that the composer will get the most acclaim.

African improvisation is as democratic as can be. That is a direct reflection of the politics of the music in African society. It is a music of participation—by master musicians, ordinary musicians, dancers, and even the public itself. This communal participation is different than the so-called spontaneity of clapping along with a folk-rock tune or the projecting of the same values on orchestra players who were trained for something else and who quite frankly prefer that something else as well.

Sandow is right in saying that if one wants to change the politics, possibly leading to educating improvising orchestras, the work must first be done in the political world, then in the musical one. That the same orchestra players want more say, in choosing what they play is more their sort of democracy—still, they will generally not receive it, as orchestras are slaves to subsidies given by institutions who want to know that they are making a good investment. When a democratized orchestra calls for programmes which do not reflect the subsidy-giver's view of what is expected, then the life-line (salary) of that player is in danger. In other words, I fear that the politics of the societies in which orchestras exist must be changed before one talks about democratizing the orchestras themselves.

3) In New York, the society which was in focus in *Ear,* the question of the place of music and of the musician in society is of primary importance as in such a society (as in the rest of the Western world for that matter) earning money and promoting music are as important to the musician as the making of music itself.

Still it surprised me that so many writers are obsessed with success. Is this a form of leftist politics or is success just getting music performed? I thought Marx's aim was to wipe out poverty, level income and create devotion to a (singular) society. His ideal was not one in which the great musician gained enormous popularity and fortunes. In the anarchist society, the musician is theoretically anonymous, yet an integral part of a society due to the universality of music.

Reading statements as Muzak's, following the imperialistic growth of the Top 40, reading the somewhat puzzling theories of Hanns Eisler concerning music for the *masses,* I wonder as does Daniel Goode, who are they? Masses are created, but they *are* not.

Unlike Richard Hayman, I do not believe that love is the goal of politics—it is control. Control limits love, as can be illustrated in any history book. Only anarchism, governmentless politics, the politics of many of the "arrogant, though probably well-meaning" (Sandow) idealists, offers unboundedness. It is, therefore, in the writings of the Tao and on anarchism where one finds that control is disbanded. (See the writings of John Cage on this. Of course he, as I, does write, a seemingly contradictory way of avoiding control.) There is no known completely anarchist society at present. New York is anarchistic (perhaps a bit chaotic) least of all, so comments on these lines are more visionary and wishful than relevent to the current situation. As long as the society is not looking in a Marxist or anarchistic or whatever direction, applying these philosophies to that society's music is synthetic.

I fear that the only way for seeking change in terms of music and the politics of a society is to change the politics and not necessarily the music. Laurie Spiegel's call to equal distribution of subsidies for composers and for alternative compositional aids is evolutionary within the American system. The composers who will fight for these things are therefore seeking evolutionary change. Whether these changes have an effect on the dispersion of a quickly changing art music world is nevertheless highly uncertain. Every musician is constantly involved in this form of music and politics and should, given a somewhat depresisng world economy and balance, prepare for a big belt tightening, something that can lead to the industrial nations' need (as in the thirties) for more musical nationalism and pride in hard times or a large-scale cut-back for the black-sheep of the bourgeoisie (Sandow).

4) Why do I compose? For whom am I composing? What are the factors that go into my style of composing? Might social factors affect the way of composing? What am I trying to communicate with my music?

I, as Cage, am (alas) an arm-chair taxpaying anarchist. I don't see contemporary society nor music as revolutionary. The enormous speed of technological development of the industrialized world gives man the semblance of being revolutionary, but we are still cruising towards a rather uncertian future. I have no intention of writing music for the masses for I am aware that contemporary music is not necessarily seasoned for all palates. In fact if anyone (yes, including myself) is pleased by my work, then it was worthwhile.

I believe that any country is a synthesis of many societies/cultures/audiences—if man was not obsessed with traveling across the globe at all hours of the day and cared more for his own milieu, then there would be no talking of masses, but of locals. Perhaps we will see the solution to the energy and milieu crisis in the 21st century, but until then man's most important consideration should be the continuation of survival—mass music is music of exploitation in one way or another and therefore hardly serves this goal. Local music is a music in which communication and emotion are of primary importance.

In other words, as I try to describe in my book, *At a Fork on the Way* (a draft of one chapter was in *Ear,* Vol. 4, #8/9—the book should come out this year), I believe that what composers and musicians should find in music is the organic reflection of their (sub)culture musically on the one hand and a use of their technology, that is, the body of knowledge of their culture on the other hand. Perhaps this organic and technological are one and the same. In any case mode, the ephemeral, and the (capitalistic) commercial leading towards international oneness in music are the cause of much uncertainty today. As many of the *Ear* writers, I have no plans of supporting myself from my compositions. Even with Meet the Composer's good intentions, most all composers will still need to find another way to earn their bread. This is not so awful as one thinks, for as Cage pays his taxes to obtain freedom to do what he wants, a working musician can play what he or she pleases without bending to Commercial Mode as a chief supporter of art. I believe that even the composer, the constantly denounced leader, has a place in this organic and technological world. For providing givens to interpreters who therefore collaborate in providing a musical experience to listeners (including themselves) is a proven way of music making in many societies. It is the composer's desire of becoming a personality which is potentially incongruous. Or is the composer searching to be one of Darwin's "fittest"? This Darwinianism as a political form is the basis of capitalism.

In summary, I request that musicians of all sorts express their feelings on the subject of politics and music in its various forms, for if society itself does not provide an awareness education in these politics, then it may have to come from the musical provinces. Visionaries are necessary in society as Sartre pointed out on so many occasions in claiming that the future, whatever form it may take on, will need its workers as well as its intellectual groups as man, a thinking and working being, needs both to survive.

Yours,

Leigh Landy
Amsterdam

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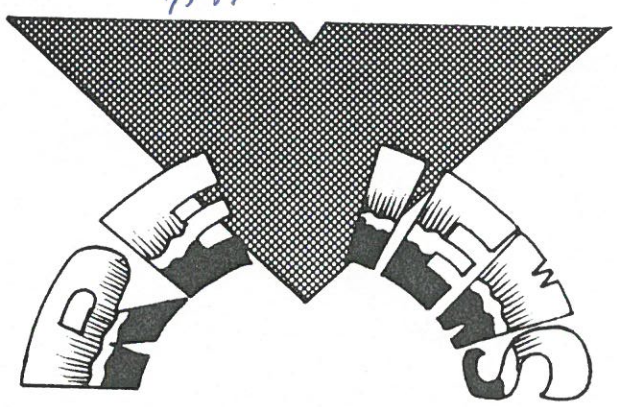

The Talking Band "Soft Targets" at La Mama Annex

"'Soft targets' is a Pentagon term designating targets not reinforced against nuclear attack, e.g. people."

So reads an epigram in the credit listings for the most recent musical theatre piece by the Talking Band, *Soft Targets.* Set in a town which nestles beside the government-sponsored Rocky Mountain Development Corporation recalling the vivid unseen images of scores of dead sheep which were reported following the release of toxic gases from the Rocky Flats nerve gas arsenal near Boulder, Colorado, this play builds a parable of radicalization, commitment, and compromise in the face of a hazardous and unyielding weapons industry.

Tina Shepard is Viola, a doctor divorcing her weapons plant director-husband, Dan. Juliet Glass is their young daughter, Jessica. Ray Barry plays Mike, a worker in the factory who comes to Viola for an independent opinion after the management gives him a mere gloss of a report following certain health problems among his workmates.

Sybille Hahn is the divorce lawyer and compromising friend of Viola. Ellen Maddow is Sandy, Viola's New Wave sister, 3 years her junior and her best confidant.

In various combinations these players skillfully enact their love, estrangement, and human frailties in the face of imagined and real challenges and horrors. The material is timely and stirring of ideas and feelings which we all carry with us daily. Many of our friends and acquaintances are there, as are we. Ben Maddow has a commanding stance as writer of this work which locates so many of the choices that we are forced to consider in this most difficult of issues.

Stuart Leigh

The musical versatility of the Talking Band adds a powerful dimension to *Soft Targets.* Alice Eve Cohen and Ellen Maddow collaborated on the music in the play (with the exception of a Charlie Parker tune and a Souza march). Alice also plays in the "Music for Homemade Instruments" group. Her work is imaginative and warm and a delight to the ear. The music in *Soft Targets* ranges from eerie (homemade instrument) effects to a well produced mock disco tune.

The piece begins with a gentle whisper of homemade rattles and wood chimes followed by a haunting theme on clarinet. As the story unfolds, sound illuminates the dramatic moments. An array of homemade instrument sound colors, a moving clarinet and piano interlude, an equally arresting choral arrangement, and a duet for clarinet and flute on the opening theme immediately come to mind.

The director, Paul Zimet, is particularly sensitive to the heightened impact of this music. At points the dramatic action freezes and the music arrests the audience's attention. At times the music functions as a film soundtrack and at other times as a musical.

It's a pleasure to hear and see a performance that is well crafted and at the same time dealing with a subject that desperately needs the world's attention.

Peter Wetzler

Thank you, Charlie! Bravo Carles!

The great sound/poetry fight at Gleason's Gym, New York City, last night (March 14) was uneven, faulted at the end, and a tremendous success! The contenders in the ring were Passaic Pig Iron Morrow and the Barcelona Bull. Charlie Morrow and Carles Santos became real boxers in silk shorts, gloves, in a boxing ring; but they fought with words, chanting, singing and gestures as their muscle. This high dada event conceived as an art performance by its instigators, Morrow, Santos and Hanson, brought supportive applause all evening for the sturdy poets contending (weighing in at about the same stone). The Bull's so memorable high falsetto provoked the irreverent Pig Iron into manic obscenities. The other high round was the Brechtian free-for-all with everyone into the ring expounding a boxing role—the beautiful Spanish Doctor, the water boys, the dancing round announcer, and the wonderful referee from Rimbo. The fact that the judges at the ringside had to break the theatre spell and actually choose a "winner' was an embarrassment to all. We, the judges, and I in particular wish to apologize to Carles for this structural misunderstanding at the end of the event. Nobody even tried to bribe us! Suddenly we had to really choose a "winner' in real time. But this was the first bout, and let Carles forgive the finale by simply resting back on his laurels. There is no other poet/composer who has come to New York City and at once become so necessary a factor to the New York art community.

Alison Knowles