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*New Music Concerts presents*

## Stefan Meets Anton & Morty Meets John

**Sunday October 6, 2013**

Betty Oliphant Theatre  
404 Jarvis Street, Toronto



New Music Concerts presents



**Stefan**

*meets*

**Anton**



**Morty**



*meets*

**John**





Robert Aitken, artistic director

43<sup>rd</sup> season | 354<sup>th</sup> event  
**Sunday October 6, 2013**  
Betty Oliphant Theatre  
404 Jarvis Street, Toronto

New Music Concerts presents

# Stefan Meets Anton & Morty Meets John



Stefan Anton Morty JOHN

2:30<sup>pm</sup> Symposium with Austin Clarkson

Presented with the generous support of the Mary-Margaret Webb Foundation

7:15<sup>pm</sup> Illuminating Introduction

8:00<sup>pm</sup> Concert

Programme:

**Anton Webern** (Austria 1883-1945) *Konzert, Op.24* (1931-1934)

Les Allt flute Keith Atkinson oboe Max Christie clarinet Chris Gongos horn  
James Gardiner trumpet Ian Cowie trombone Stephen Sitarski violin  
Douglas Perry viola Stephen Clarke piano Robert Aitken direction

**Morton Feldman** (USA 1926-1987) *Structures for String Quartet* (1951)

Accordes: Stephen Sitarski, Carol Lynn Fujino violins  
Douglas Perry viola David Hetherington cello

**Stefan Wolpe** (Germany/USA 1902-1972) *Chamber Piece No.1* (1964)  
Les Allt flute Keith Atkinson oboe Melissa Scott english horn Max Christie clarinet  
Fraser Jackson bassoon Chris Gongos horn James Gardiner trumpet Ian Cowie trombone  
Stephen Sitarski, Carol Lynn Fujino violins Douglas Perry viola David Hetherington cello  
Roberto Occhipinti bass Stephen Clarke piano Robert Aitken direction

— Intermission —

**John Cage** (USA 1926-1987) *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949-1950)

1. Quietly flowing along | 2. Slowly rocking | 3. Nearly stationary | 4. Quodlibet  
Accordes: Stephen Sitarski, Carol Lynn Fujino violins  
Douglas Perry viola David Hetherington cello

**Anton Webern** *Konzert, Op.24*  
(reprise)

**Morton Feldman** *Projection 5* (1951)  
Dianne Aitken, Robert Aitken, Les Allt flutes James Gardiner trumpet Stephen Clarke piano  
Stephen Sitarski violin David Hetherington cello Roberto Occhipinti bass

**Stefan Wolpe** *Concerto for Nine Instruments, Op.22* (1933-1934)  
Revised edition by Austin Clarkson (world premiere)  
with the generous support of Daniel Cooper and the Blais Green Charitable Foundation  
Les Allt flute Max Christie clarinet Fraser Jackson bassoon Chris Gongos horn  
James Gardiner trumpet Ian Cowie trombone Stephen Sitarski violin  
David Hetherington cello Stephen Clarke piano Robert Aitken direction

Tonight's event was made possible thanks to the assistance of the Stefan Wolpe Society

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## Stefan Meets Anton & Morty Meets John

### A Tale of Two Concertos and Two Quartets

Austin Clarkson

*When one approaches and looks at and observes great works of art,  
one must approach them... in the same way one has to approach  
works of nature, with the necessary awe at the secrets they are  
based on, at the mystery they contain.*

— Anton Webern (1933)

*The natural flow of sounds which music is reassures us of order,  
just as the sequence of the seasons and the regular  
alternation of night and day do.*

— John Cage (1947)

*Yes, double-content of nature, to be core and inwardly held,  
to be form and mould, extended into and outwardly grasped.*

— Stefan Wolpe (1960)

*When you are involved with sound as a sound, as a limited yet infinite  
thought, to borrow Einstein's phrase, new ideas suggest themselves,  
need defining, exploring, need a mind that knows  
it is entering a living world not a dead one.*

— Morton Feldman (1967)

---

“Stefan Meets Anton and Morty Meets John” brings together musical ideas from Berlin after “The War to End all Wars,” from Leningrad before Stalin imposed his brand of Socialist Realism, from Vienna under the shadow of National Socialism, and from New York during the McCarthy era. Composers in America were as engaged with these ideas as were their European colleagues, but the influx of refugees from Europe in the 1930s contributed to the upheaval in the arts that happened in the aftermath of World War II. Stefan Wolpe was one of the agents in that tectonic shift.

**Stefan Wolpe** (1902-1972) studied piano, harmony and counterpoint, and composed much music as a teenager. He rebelled against conservatory training and quit the Berlin Musikhochschule. He joined the circle of the visionary composer

and pianist Ferruccio Busoni, hung out with the Melos Circle around Hermann Scherchen, and participated in Dada happenings. His schooling continued informally at the Bauhaus, the progressive art school founded at Weimar by Walter Gropius. He listened to Vassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer and other masters, and participated in workshops of Johannes Itten and Gertrude Grunow, who cultivated the creative imagination and the integration of body, mind and spirit. As a member of the *Novembergruppe* of revolutionary artists and writers, Wolpe was active as pianist and composer in programs that brought modern art to poor neighbourhoods. In 1928 he joined the Workers' Music Movement under Hanns Eisler, and for four years wrote march songs for agitprop troupes, anthems for labor unions, and music for Communist dance and theatre companies. He was music director of *Truppe 31*, a company of actors and musicians led by the actor, director and playwright Gustav von Wangenheim. Their first show, *The Mousetrap (Die Mausefalle)*, played on Shakespeare and Goethe while demonstrating Marxism with the latest techniques of theatrical montage. The show was a hit, and after a run in Berlin went on tour through Germany, where it was attacked as “cultural Bolshevism.”

When Hitler seized power in February of 1933, the police banned *Truppe 31*. Wolpe escaped from Germany with the help of the Romanian pianist and Dalcroze teacher Irma Schoenberg and found refuge in Switzerland. In May and June of 1933 he rejoined *Truppe 31* on a tour to Russia, where he was inspired by Soviet society and greatly impressed by the composers of Leningrad, especially Dmitri Shostakovich, who were creating modern music under socialism. Before joining the Workers' Music Movement, Wolpe had written song cycles on the poetry of Hölderlin, Kleist, Rilke and Tagore, works for the musical theatre, but no larger forms. The expertise of the Leningrad composers impressed Wolpe with the need to deepen and broaden his technical abilities. Aged 31, he went to Vienna to study with Anton Webern and compose a piano concerto and a symphony.

*The Path to the New Music*, the series of lectures that Webern delivered in 1932 and 1933, encompassed the world of ideas into which Wolpe stepped when he entered the master's studio. Webern founded his philosophy on Goethe's idea of the unity of



art and nature: "art is a product of nature in general, taking the particular form of human nature." On summer hikes in the Austrian Alps, Webern meditated on Goethe's idea of the "primeval plant" (*Urpflanze*), that every part of the plant—root, stalk, blossom—comes from the same source. Schoenberg's idea of the twelve-note row made it possible to achieve in a piece of music the awesome and mysterious variety in unity of an Edelweiss, or a mountain landscape. For Webern: "Unity is completely ensured by the underlying series. It's always the same; only its manifestations are different." Webern's music arose not from a desire for hermetic obscurity, but to make the relationships between the unity of a piece of music as clear as possible to the lay listener, "to show how one thing leads to another." Similarly, his lectures were to explain the foundations of the new music so that the general public can better appreciate its depths: "to see chasms in truisms, ... to be spiritually involved."

On showing Webern his new piece, *March and Variations for Two Pianos*, a heated discussion ensued over the relative merits of absolute music and music for use (*Gebrauchsmusik*). Wolpe argued that music's function was to spur people to action, while Webern defended music's autonomy. After his second lesson Wolpe ran into the pianist Edward Steuermann, who joked that Wolpe's meeting with Webern must have been like Stalin visiting the Pope. Nevertheless, a warm collaboration developed. Although Webern taught Wolpe without fee, lessons lasted at least two hours and were often followed by long conversations over coffee. Webern helped Wolpe to be more self-aware and to compose more freely. For Wolpe it was a time of self-discovery, during which he envisioned "a grander, *musikantish* music appropriate for this epoch." Wolpe saw himself as a '*Musikant*,' that is, a 'journeyman or itinerant musician, a minstrel,' rather than a bourgeois composer.

## Two Concertos

Wolpe began to compose a Concerto for Piano and Wind Band – three saxophones, three trumpets and three trombones. The "*musikantish*" instrumentation was similar to the poster music Wolpe had produced for political rallies in Berlin. He wrote to Irma that Webern did not approve of the music's "more stirring, naked outrageous qualities," complaining that Webern was "stuck in his

molehill" and failed to understand "the dialectic of a worker's song or music with a revolutionary gesture." Webern must have thought carefully how to help this gifted but headstrong revolutionary. Documentation is lacking, so we can only speculate that while looking through Wolpe's Concerto Webern thought of the piano concerto that he had begun two years earlier and then set aside. On October 9, 1933, the day of Wolpe's third lesson, Webern picked up the sketches of his *Konzert, Op. 24* and reduced the scoring from full orchestra to eleven instruments: three woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet), three brass (trumpet, French Horn, trombone) and five strings (string quartet and piano). He then showed Wolpe the score and discussed the problems he was addressing. There can scarcely be another explanation for the fact that Wolpe changed the instrumentation from brass band to virtually the same scoring as Webern's *Konzert*: three woodwinds (flute, clarinet, bassoon), three brass (trumpet, French horn, trombone), and three strings (violin, cello and piano). Whatever Webern did wrought an immediate transformation. Within a couple of weeks Wolpe wrote that Webern was a great treasure: "Only here have I come to learn for the first time of the extraordinary possibilities of which I am capable, and I am gaining the courage (Webern's help) for a more comprehensive musical self-awareness, and I am addressing the problem of my self-realization." By revealing the workings of his own creative process, Webern succeeded in reflecting back to Wolpe his authentic creative potential.

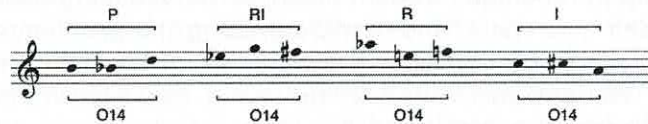
Webern and Wolpe both completed their concertos in the following year. Wolpe likely composed the last three movements of his *Concerto* by May of 1934, while Webern finished *Konzert, Op. 24* in time to dedicate it to Arnold Schoenberg on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, September 13. In completing the *Konzert*, Webern reduced the string complement to violin and viola, thus ending up with three times three woodwinds, brass and strings, as in Wolpe's *Concerto*, though Webern preferred the more luminous oboe and viola to Wolpe's more earthy bassoon and cello. The kinship between Webern's lapidary *Konzert* and Wolpe's epic *Concerto* would seem to end there. Webern's three movements last seven minutes, while Wolpe's four go on for twenty-five. Yet Webern's hand is evident: after three tonal, *musikantish* movements, the fourth is a set of twelve variations on a twelve-note theme.



## Anton Webern, *Konzert*, Op. 24 (1934)

To affirm the historical continuity of twelve-note music, the early dodecaphonists modeled their compositions on traditional forms. The first movement of Webern's *Konzert* is loosely modeled on Sonata Form, the second on ABA Song Form, and the third on Theme and Variations. In the plan that Webern sketched for the concerto, he associated the first movement with one of his favorite places in the country, and the second and third movements with the villages where his parents were buried and with his wife and their son. The piece would thus embody the spirit of a beloved landscape and of three generations of his family.

The 12-note row of the *Konzert* is famous for its symmetry: four permutations of a single three-note unit. Each trichord contains a minor second, a minor third and a major third, and thus has the semitone formula 014. The trichord appears in four permutations: Prime, Retrograde Inversion, Retrograde and Inversion. The row is thus a microcosm, providing the "stem cells" from which the manifold parts of the composition were generated.



Example 1a. Anton Webern, *Konzert*, Op. 24. Tone row.

The structure of *Konzert*, Op. 24 has given rise to many theories, among them, Karlheinz Stockhausen's claim that the first movement is a forerunner of integral serialism. However, Webern did not seek to break with tradition, but rather "to say what has been said before in a new way." By adapting twelve-note music to traditional forms, he believed that he had achieved complete freedom, but literal repetition is avoided. Each moment is unique, and rich in expressive detail. Instruments exchange two- and three-note gestures in a mosaic of call and response, interruption and delay, question and exclamation, excitement and calm. The pulse fluctuates as in a living, breathing organism. It is a piano concerto, hence the piano plays a leading role, but each instrument has a distinctive character. As in a mobile sculpture, the stronger sounds appear closer and the quieter sounds more distant.

The dramatic First Movement has two contrasting themes. The first is bright, extraverted and witty (Example 1b), while the second, led by the piano, is quiet and pensive. Three-note shapes dominate the successive moods of exposition, development, recapitulation and coda. The Second Movement is slow and meditative, the shapes consisting of two pulses rather than three (Example 1c). The piano is a constant presence, while the other instruments offer fragments of a melody. The first section lacks the French Horn, the second lacks the Viola, and the ensemble unites for the third section, which dissipates the material into thin air. The theme of the Third Movement is a canon based on two motives given in the first four bars (Example 1d). The four variations emphasize, respectively, three-note chords, two-pulse shapes, and three-note chords.

The image shows the first five measures of the first movement of Anton Webern's *Konzert*, Op. 24. The score is written for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Trumpet (Tpt.), and Piano (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'Etwas lebhaft' with a quarter note equal to c. 80. The score shows the initial three-note motifs for each instrument. The Flute part starts with a trichord (G4, A4, B4) marked 'f'. The Oboe part starts with a trichord (C5, B4, A4) marked 'f'. The Clarinet part starts with a trichord (G4, F4, E4) marked 'f'. The Trumpet part starts with a trichord (D4, C4, B3) marked 'f'. The Piano part starts with a trichord (G4, A4, B4) marked 'f'. The score includes dynamic markings (f, p) and articulation (accents, slurs). The tempo changes from 'rit.' to 'tempo' and back to 'rit.'.

Example 1b. Anton Webern, *Konzert*, Op. 24, I, mm. 1-5.

The premiere took place at Prague in September of 1935, with Heinrich Jalowetz conducting and Edward Steuermann at the piano. The young Italian composer Luigi Dallapiccola was amazed by the *Konzert*: "It seems to represent an entire world."



Sehr langsam  $\text{♩} = c. 40$

Fl.  $mp$

Ob.  $mp$

Cl.  $pp$

Tpt.  $pp$  immer mit Dmpf.

Vln.  $pp$  arco mit Dmpf.  $p$

Vla.  $pp$  arco mit Dmpf.  $p$

Pno.  $pp$   $p$   $pp$   $mp$   $mp$

Example 1c. Anton Webern, *Konzert*, Op. 24, II, mm. 1-8.

Sehr rasch  $\text{♩} = c. 120$

Ob.  $f$

Cl.  $f$

Hn.  $f$  mit Dmpf.

Tpt.  $f$  immer mit Dmpf.

Tbn.  $f$  immer mit Dmpf.

Pno.  $f$

Example 1d. Anton Webern, *Konzert*, Op. 24, III, mm. 1-6.

### Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for Nine Instruments* (1934)

The prospect of a performance arose in Jerusalem in 1937, when William Steinberg, then conductor of the Palestine Symphony, expressed interest in performing the *Concerto* on a program with Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*. Stefan and Irma copied out the instrumental parts, but the performance did not take place. The full score and violin part then disappeared. The circumstances of the loss remain a mystery, and efforts to locate the missing materials have failed. Harry Vogt of the West German Radio, Cologne, commissioned Johannes Schöllhorn to reconstruct the score from the eight surviving parts. Cues for the violin in the other parts provided about forty bars for the violin, and Schöllhorn considered reconstructing the violin part. He decided that Wolpe's music is so dense and unpredictable that it would be impossible, concluding that the *Concerto* is nevertheless "a thoroughly coherent work, with the added color of brief violin passages." Ensemble recherche, conducted by Emilio Pomárico, gave the premiere of the *Concerto* at Cologne in 2002, on the occasion of Wolpe's centenary. Werner Herbers, who conducted the same group for the recording in 2003, made further revisions. While writing an account of Wolpe's first year in exile, I took a closer look at the *Concerto* and was able to restore another eighty bars for the violin with some confidence that I wasn't departing too far from Wolpe's intentions. That led to the preparation of a new edition of the *Concerto* and the idea for this concert.

Wolpe's visit to Leningrad in the spring of 1933 may have sparked the idea for the clarinet solo that begins the second movement of the *Concerto*. The gentle rocking motion of the clarinet melody is very similar in timbre and feeling to the clarinet solo that begins Shostakovich's *Third Symphony*. Shostakovich modeled his Second and Third Symphonies on the pageants that were performed during the annual festivals of post-revolutionary Russia. The so-called "Revolutionary Scenario" comprised such scenes as: (1) Dark Chaos of the Unenlightened Past, (2) Pastoral Idyll, (3) Awakening of Protest and Revolutionary Consciousness, (4) Struggle Between Forces of Revolution and Reaction, (5) Funeral March for Fallen Comrades, and (6) Victory Celebration. It seems that Wolpe selected scenes from the Revolutionary Scenario for the *Concerto* and the *Studies for Orchestra* that he composed in Vienna, though he did not give them



explicit titles in order to spare Webern from yet more *Gebrauchsmusik*. The four movements of the Concerto appear to correspond with: (1) Revolutionary Consciousness, (2) Pastoral Idyll, (3) Funeral March and Lament, and (4) The New Dispensation.

**Part 1: Fast, irrepensible, with great vitality.** The Violin and Piano set off with a foursquare theme of the irrepensible, irreverent, energetic revolutionary (Example 2a). It is fortunate that the Violin melody was written out in the Piano part, for otherwise we would not know the protagonist of the movement. The theme combines four gestures: **A** "vigorous stride" (leaps in quarters and eighths), **B** "urgent action" (arpeggiated sixteenths), **C** "firm resolve" (reiterated sixteenths with minor third cadence), and **D** "unruly motion" (Piano chording, with irregular triple- and duple-beat groupings). The episodes unfold with brief solos while the ensemble plays with motifs derived from the theme. As in a commune, instruments contribute equally to the proceedings, resting for no more than two or three bars at a time. The passages of repeated Piano chords that conclude each episode in a kind of refrain invite the addition of versions of the main theme for the Violin.

Violin

Piano

Vn

Pno

1x3 3x2 1x4 1x2

Example 2a. Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for 9 Instruments*, I, mm. 1-9, © 2003, Peermusic.

**Part 2: Adagio.** The Clarinet solo that begins Shostakovich's *Third Symphony* with a kind of lullaby is in the Dorian mode, whereas Wolpe's melody draws on modes of Klezmer music – Altered Mixolydian and Altered Dorian (Example 2b). Wolpe's paternal family originated in the Kovno district of Lithuania, and in 1925 Wolpe made arrangements of a collection of Yiddish folksongs. At a time of dislocation and distress Wolpe may have sought comfort from recalling his Jewish heritage in this Pastoral. The ensemble elaborates each phrase of the melody in successive episodes, weaving intricate arabesques into a rich mosaic, reflecting the ornate improvisations of Yiddish folk singing. The concluding episode winds down with a guttural passage for Horn, Trombone and Cello that casts a shadow on the idyll. The movement ends with a reprise of the Clarinet melody.

Adagio ♩ = 50-54

Cl

A

mf

A1

B

mp mf

C

f (espressivo)

D

mp ppp

Example 2b. Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for 9 Instruments*, II, mm. 1-6, © 2003, Peermusic.

**Part 3: Song Without Words. Rather slow, radiant and solemn.** Over a grinding slow march, the Brass Trio plays a strident, obsessive melody in the Altered Dorian mode (Example 2c). If the Song had Words, it would be an angry, bitter lament. A lyrical strain



follows, and the quasi-development section combines material from the two strains. The movement ends with a reprise of the first strain, to which a version of the Brass melody has been reconstructed for the Violin.

1 *Ziemlich langsam, glänzend und pathetisch*

Example 2c. Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for 9 Instruments*, III, mm. 1-4. © 2003, Peermusic.

**Part 4: With Joy (Variations).** We can only speculate on what passed between Webern and Wolpe on the subject of twelve-note music, but this set of twelve variations on a twelve-note row suggests that they discussed it at length. The row forms and canons in Variation 1 and Variation 11 appear to be modeled on the row topography of Webern's *Quartet*, Op. 22. Wolpe's row is far different from Webern's, consisting of four familiar triads: **A**, diminished triad; **B**, three elements of a dominant seventh chord; **C**, minor triad; and **D**, augmented triad (Example 2d). Wolpe shaped the theme with three passes through the row: Prime (ABCD), Retrograde (DCBA), Prime abbreviated (BCD) (Example 2e). In this way Wolpe staked out a middle ground for twelve-note music between tonality and the dissonant dodecaphony of the Viennese.

Example 2d. Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for 9 Instruments*, Tone Row. © 2003, Peermusic.

Example 2e. Stefan Wolpe, *Concerto for 9 instruments*, IV, mm. 1-11. © 2003, Peermusic.



Five of the variations last less than half a minute, and only Variation 12 is more than a minute in length. They are grouped in three sets: 1 to 4, 5 to 7, 8 to 12. While Variation 1 sets off in high spirits with a set of canons, succeeding variations are in free forms, as in vignettes of a picaresque adventure. Variation 8 begins the last set with a recitative-like passage in which the Brass trio chatter quietly on trichord **B**. Variations 9 and 10 bring forth the Trickster, the Brass trio delivering "hee-haw" outbursts. The three-part canons of Variation 11 provide the polyphonic climax, the strict imitation making it possible to recover twelve more bars for the Violin. Variation 12, "*Misterioso*," is a hushed meditation, as though bidding fond farewell to each of the triads that make up the row. The ensemble then crescendos, landing triple forte on trichord **B** in a mock dominant suspense. As though waking from a dream, a dotted-rhythm version of the theme jumps in, the instruments scrambling their notes in a boisterous reunion. The Violin brings the rowdy crew to order for the Coda, which reprises the theme and the first variation. The fourth movement concludes the Revolutionary Scenario not with a hymn to socialism, as in Shostakovich's Second and Third Symphonies, but with a vision of socialist music under the aegis of dodecaphony.

Springtime in Russia and autumn in Vienna set Wolpe on the path to squaring the circle between music as an agent for individual and social change and music as an art unto itself. But the time with Webern was cruelly cut short. In December of 1933 the police charged Wolpe with "lacking a purpose for residency" and expelled him from Austria. Irma Schoenberg again came to the rescue, bringing Wolpe to her home in Bucharest. They obtained papers to immigrate to British Mandate Palestine, and in May of 1934 sailed from Constanta to Jaffa, took up residence in Jerusalem, and were married.

### **From Jerusalem to New York**

The four years that the Wolpes spent in the British Mandate of Palestine were a crucial period of recovery and renewal between youth and early adulthood in Germany and the second half of life in America. Between 1934 and 1938 Irma Schoenberg taught piano and Stefan Wolpe taught composition and conducted the choir of the Palestine Conservatoire. They became surrogate parents to a commune of young refugee music students, mainly from Germany.

Wolpe composed a substantial body of music for both the concert hall and the kibbutzim: twelve-note compositions for piano, chamber ensemble and orchestra; Hebrew art songs on texts from the Bible and contemporary poets; and choral settings for amateur and trained choirs. Wolpe's mission was to create a modern repertoire for "The New Palestine" that would embody the aspirations of the Jewish settlers while incorporating musical materials from indigenous (including Arabic) sources. But Wolpe's music and politics were too radical for those who controlled the musical institutions of Palestine, and the Wolpes undertook a second exodus to America.

They settled in New York and taught in both that city and Philadelphia, attracting many students, among them, Ralph Shapey, Leonard Meyer, David Tudor, Jacob Maxin, Elmer Bernstein, Kenyon Hopkins, Isaac Nemiroff, Claus Adam, Robert Mann and Morton Feldman. Big band composers and jazz artists went to Wolpe to learn to incorporate modern ideas: Johnny Carisi, Eddie Sauter, Bill Finegan, George Russell, Tony Scott. At the weekly musicales in the Wolpe apartment on 110<sup>th</sup> Street Irma's students played piano repertoire and Stefan's students heard readings of their compositions by Tudor, Maxin and other fine musicians. Composers from out of town visited, and the Juilliard and LaSalle String Quartets tried out their programs. Morton Feldman said about the Wolpe musicales: "Irma and Stefan out at Cathedral Parkway had these soirées, which was very exciting for me, a young composer across the river. Whoever was in town will come up. Kirchner was in from the West Coast, played two or three of his pieces. I remember Leibowitz was in from Paris with Helen." When John Cage attended a Wolpe musicale in the fall of 1949, he felt he was at "the *true* center of New York, and it was almost an *unknown* center of New York." During the next few years Wolpe and Cage were at the core of new music developments in downtown New York. Though their backgrounds, temperaments and musical ideas differed greatly, they shared socialist politics and a deep attachment to the visual arts.

### **Convergence**

Wolpe made drawings and paintings while at the Bauhaus, and his closest friends were painters. Herbert Brün, who studied with Wolpe in Jerusalem, said Stefan surrounded himself with paintings



and taught his students how to look at them: "Touch. Touch with the eyes, touch with the ears, touch with the fingers. Everything's touch." Cage was both a visual artist and a composer and was close friends with Marcel Duchamp and the Surrealists. In the late 1940s and early 1950s Edgard Varèse (who also painted), Cage, Wolpe and Wolpe's students Feldman, Shapey and Tudor were members of the Eighth Street Artists' Club of Abstract Expressionist painters. It was an extraordinary convergence of musicians and visual artists. Critics, philosophers and composers gave lectures, exploring and arguing about space and time, the creative process, the unconscious mind, the metaphysics of art. The artists attended concerts and the musicians attended art shows. Art historian Dore Ashton said that what distinguished the whole community was its agreement that the unknown was of higher value than the known. "What was great about the fifties," said Feldman, "is that for one brief moment - maybe, say, six weeks - nobody understood art."

## Two String Quartets

### John Cage, *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950)

In the spring of 1949 John Cage (1912-1992) went to Paris to study the life and work of Erik Satie at the Bibliothèque Nationale. In August, while in Paris, he began *String Quartet in Four Parts*, in which he developed the idea (he attributed it to Satie and Webern) of structuring music by means of rhythmic proportions and thus reducing the role of harmony and counterpoint. He returned to New York in the fall and completed the Quartet in February of 1950. He described the Quartet in a letter to Pierre Boulez: "*String Quartet in Four Parts* uses a gamut of assorted sounds, single and accords, which are always played on the same strings of the same instruments. There is no counterpoint and no harmony. Only a line in rhythmic space (2 ½ . 1 ½ / 2 . 3 / 6 . 5 / ½ . 1 ½ ). The whole lasts 17 ½ minutes and is in one tempo throughout!" In another letter to Boulez, Cage added that the sounds are "immobile, that is staying always not only in the same register ... but on the same strings and bowed or produced in the same manner on the same instruments. ... The continuity is uncontrolled and spontaneous in all except the third movements, where is it strictly canonic." Cage related the Four Parts to the Indian conception of the four seasons, and in particular,

where he was in the summer and fall of 1949. The musicians are instructed to play without vibrato and with minimum weight on the bow to underline the feeling of a music of stasis. The diatonic melody, open fifths, harmonics, and mainly quiet dynamics evoke a medieval ambience. The duration of each Part is some multiple of the unit 22, which also determines the length of each sub-section.

**Part 1: "Quietly Flowing Along."** Summer in France. The movement consists of 2 ½ + 1 ½ units, a total of 4 x 22 = 88 bars. The first four bars are given in Example 3a.

Example 3a. John Cage, *String Quartet*, I, mm. 1-4. © 1960, Henmar Press Inc.

Example 3b. John Cage, *String Quartet*, I, mm. 1-4, Reduction.

The top-most notes form a "tone-colour melody" (Example 3b). The successive notes of the melody are played by Cello, Violin 1, Viola, Violin 1, Cello, Violin I, Violin II. Since the melody is mostly at the top of the treble staff, the Cello and Viola often play in their upper register.



Example 3c. John Cage, *String Quartet, II*, mm. 1-5. © 1960, Henmar Press Inc.

Example 3d. John Cage, *String Quartet, III*, mm. 1-8. © 1960, Henmar Press Inc.

Example 3e. John Cage, *String Quartet, IV*, mm. 1-5. © 1960, Henmar Press Inc.

**Part 2: "Slowly Rocking."** Fall in America. The movement consists of 2 + 3 units, a total of 5 x 22 = 110 bars. The motion is interrupted by rests and ends with long-held chords (Example 3c).

**Part 3: "Nearly Stationary."** Winter. The movement consists of 6 + 5, a total of 11 x 22 = 242 bars. The timeless quality of the longest movement results from the repetition of the each segment backwards (retrograde) as in a palindrome. The second half of the movement is a palindrome of the first half (Example 3d).

**Part 4: "Quodlibet."** Spring. The movements consists of ½ + 1½ units, a total of 2 x 22 = 44 bars. The beat is on the quarter note, hence this is the shortest and most lively movement (Example 3e). A Quodlibet is a combination of several known tunes (as in the last of Bach's Goldberg Variations) but the melodies of Part 4 are original. Morton Feldman said of Cage's *String Quartet*, it is "a modern classic," a "sensationally gorgeous piece" that culminates the period before Cage became "the John Cage that most people know."

Cage composed "Lecture on Nothing" with a rhythmic structure similar to the *String Quartet*. The two works proclaimed an aesthetic of detachment, of letting sounds become themselves, of inviting the listener to participate in the creative process: "This is a composed talk, for I am making it just as I make a piece of music. It is like a glass of milk. We need the glass and we need the milk. Or again, it is like an empty glass into which at any moment anything may be poured." The lecture ends: "Everybody has a song which is no song at all: it is a process of singing and when you sing you are where you are. All I know about method is that when I am not working I sometimes think I know something, but when I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing."

On returning to New York in the fall of 1949, Cage attended a dance program by Jean Erdman's company. The program included Cage's *Ophelia* (1946), danced by Erdman with David Tudor at the piano. Cage spoke to Tudor after the concert, and Tudor invited him to a Wolpe musicale. Feldman was at the musicale that Cage attended, but did not speak with him. A few weeks later, in late January of 1950, Dmitri Mitropoulos conducted the New York Philharmonic in Webern's *Symphony, Op. 21*. Feldman said that he left immediately afterwards, as the audience reaction to the piece was so antagonistic and disturbing. "I was more or less catching



my breath in the empty lobby when John came out. I recognized him, though we had never met, walked over and, as though I had known him all my life, said, Wasn't that beautiful! A moment later we were talking animatedly about how beautiful the piece sounded in so large a hall. We immediately made arrangements for me to visit him." Feldman brought Cage the String Quartet that he was working on. Cage looked at it a long time and asked, "How did you make this?" Feldman answered, "I don't know how I made it." Cage jumped up and down excitedly and said, "It's so beautiful and he doesn't know how he made it!"

**Morton Feldman** (1926-1987) began studies with Wolpe in 1944, after he left high school, and ended in about 1949 with the song "Journey to the End of the Night," and *Episode for Orchestra* (Nov. 1, 1949), which he dedicated to Wolpe. When Feldman spoke of Wolpe in later years, he at times emphasized their differences and at others, how important Wolpe had been to his "civilization." His remarks resonate with what Wolpe learned from Webern: "Stefan was never authoritarian in his teaching. . . . He didn't help me make what I was doing better, and he never led me into something else. Which has become a model of my own teaching, that particular *attitude*. With Stefan it was always that confrontation actually with *the piece at hand*. That became a very important model for me." The concept of 'shape' (*Gestalt*) was at the core of Wolpe's aesthetic: "That element of *shape* instilled me. It's a big influence when a teacher talks about shape, insofar as that consciousness of just that word could go into any style. I could bring a shape into a simultaneous chord, I could shape a chord, so to speak." Another central concept was dialectics. Feldman said that as a dialectical materialist Wolpe encouraged Socratic dialogue, "loved the conversation, loved the questions and the answers." Wolpe insisted that students look at the other side of the coin, statement and contradiction, the drama of the opposites. Feldman said that "the world of opposites" helped him tremendously, "but what I would consider opposites." In the 1920s Wolpe had composed "Music of Stasis" (*Stehende Musik*) in resistance to the prevailing developing variation and loved the music of his friend Varèse, but Wolpe was unable to accept Feldman's "stop-and-go, stop-and-go . . . the fact that it wasn't organic." Cage gave Feldman permission to pursue his fragmentary, non-developmental music that sought the other side of the coin of the highly charged, transformational music of Wolpe. As Feldman said: "What I would consider opposites."

### Morton Feldman, *Structures for String Quartet* (1951)

Feldman completed *Structures for String Quartet* in March of 1951. That month he was in New Haven to hear Wolpe give the lecture "Spatial Relations, Harmonic Structures and Shapes" at the Yale School of Music. The lecture set forth ideas that Wolpe had been developing since the mid-1940s about spatial shapes constructed by means of interval proportions. As illustrations Wolpe composed *Seven Pieces for Three Pianos*, which he dedicated to Varèse. Varèse had developed similar techniques in the 1920s, but was famously averse to revealing his methods. Feldman, who was as close to Varèse as he was to Wolpe, absorbed these ideas into a vision of music that would explore the space between music and painting: "The new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore." He learned from the painters that "process could be a fantastic subject matter." To experience the act of composing as though it were painting, Feldman laid down sounds as delicately and intuitively as he observed his friend Philip Guston while painting (Example 4).

Example 4. Morton Feldman, *Structures*, mm. 1-9. © 1962, C. F. Peters Corp.

Shapes formed by faintly audible clusters of sounds are sometimes continuously varied and sometimes repeated. "Soft as possible" eliminates the contrast of dynamics, flattens the surface and removes the illusion of depth. Contrasts of colour and texture are reduced to harmonics, plucking, and playing at the bridge.



Feldman thought of his work as “*between categories*. Between time and space. Between painting and music. Between the music’s construction and its surface.” He sought time in “its unstructured existence.” The listener is invited to meditate on each sound as itself. The poet Frank O’Hara compared the piece to Emily Dickinson’s poetry: “It does not seem to be what it is until all questions of ‘seeming’ have disappeared in its own projection.”

Feldman: “My compositional impetus is in terms of the vertical quality, and not what happens in terms of the horizontal scheme.” The vertical shapes floating quietly in space are not without coherence. Harmonic structures are related by similarity and contrast of pitch content, and the distances among notes reveal spatial proportions, as in the music of Varèse and Wolpe. In bars 1-4 the pitch space extends through three octave regions from low E (Cello) to high g-sharp<sup>2</sup> (Violin I). The highest and lowest notes that define the space are played with the bow (*arco*), while the other notes are plucked (*pizzicato*). In bar 3 the space is divided almost exactly in half by the bowed b-flat of the Second Violin. The three bowed notes thus form a symmetrical shape. The high f octave in bar 5 increases the space to five octave regions, which the next sounds fill asymmetrically. In this way the vertical shapes engage in a subtle play of symmetry and asymmetry.

### Morton Feldman, *Projection 5* (1951)

Feldman described Guston’s paintings as “existing somewhere between the canvas and ourselves.” In exploring the “inbetweenness” of musical notation and musical sound, Feldman experimented with graphing. It was like the tablature that a guitarist reads, which shows which fingers to place on which strings. He said that his graphic approach was actually inspired by Wolpe: “The world of opposites helped me tremendously. I took this overall concept with me into my own music soon after finishing my studies with Wolpe. It was the basis of my graph music. For example: the time is given but not the pitch. Or the pitch is given and not the rhythm. Or, in earlier notated pieces of mine the appearance of octaves and tonal intervals out of context to the overall harmonic language.”

*Projection 5*, for 3 Flutes, Trumpet, 3 Cellos and 2 Pianos, is one of a number of graphic scores from the early 1950s. The second page of the four-page score is given in Example 5.

Example 5. Morton Feldman, *Projection 5*, mm. 11-20. © 1964, C. F. Peters Corp.

The vertical dotted lines mark off time units of four pulses (*icti*) at a tempo of 72 to the minute. The square and rectangular shapes in each time unit indicate whether the sounds are to be in the low, middle or high regions of the instrument’s range. “Any tone within these ranges may be sounded. The limits of the ranges may be freely chosen by the player. Duration is indicated by the amount of space taken up by the square or rectangle. Dynamics are very low. Trumpet and Cello with mutes.” The Trumpet plays into a Piano to create delicate sounds of sympathetic resonance with the Piano strings. The diamond shape indicates harmonics in the strings, and resonance in the Piano. The numbers in the piano boxes indicate the number of notes played. ‘A’ and ‘PZ’ in the Cellos indicate *arco* and *pizzicato*.

To some, Feldman’s graphic scores seemed to be a move in the direction of Cage’s indeterminacy, but Feldman saw them as less determinate in structure, though not indeterminate in intention. He said they were intended to evoke “the collision with the Instant, which is the first step to the Abstract Experience.” The musicians



are co-creators of the piece, which will vary from one performance to the next. David Tudor was not satisfied with his performance of one of Feldman's graphic pieces for piano and thereafter wrote out his realizations. John Holzaepfel analyzed how Tudor translated the notation "into a single instance of an infinity of possibilities," and in so doing took piano technique to a new level of virtuosity.

### Stefan Wolpe, *Chamber Piece No. 1* (1964)

As a native son returning to Germany in 1956 for the first time since his exile in 1933, Wolpe presented an overview of new musical developments in America to the Summer Courses of New Music at Darmstadt. He discussed the music of eighteen composers from Varèse to Christian Wolff, with excerpts on recording and performed by Tudor. He emphasized the importance of jazz in opening up the scores of American composers so as to "admit something stranger into the work of art." In opposition to integral serialism he advocated music as a direct manifestation of the creative imagination, illustrating the point with an excerpt from Varèse's *Ionisation*. He gave particular attention to pieces by John Cage, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff. About a piano piece by Feldman he said: "the poetry consists in a gradual dissolution of the sound material... surfaces that are as spare as possible ... the remnants of shapes that can barely be heard at a distance. Brought to the brink of dissolution, this music is a diabolic test of beauty. Here the material is formed in the flow of its spontaneous generation. The idea of safety through structure is gone."

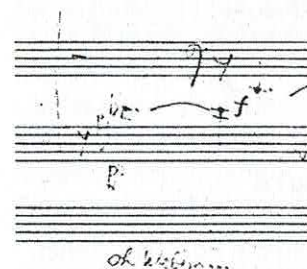
The visit to Europe had a decisive impact. The new developments in America and Europe, coupled with the revival of interest in Webern, prompted Wolpe to renew his compositional thinking in terms of non-hierarchical, non-goal-directed processes. He posited a "discontinuum," in which the listener is invited "to observe and take notes in the dark, to watch the game of disengaged sensations, the infinite intercourse of conditions: of calls, moves, haunted responses, all without a home, of shape, of stuff, of pulse - of failures, of death, secretive cues, incredible transformations - a leaf caught in the mouth, a tone caught in silence ..." He reaffirmed the importance of trusting "the intuitive form sense," which is able to compose "inevitably" under any and all conditions. Wolpe composed a series of works that combined strong construction and intense expression in open, improvisatory forms. *Form for Piano*

(1959) was the first of the series. On hearing Severino Gazzeloni perform Boulez's *Sonatine*, he composed *Piece in Two Parts for Flute and Piano* (1960) for the brilliant flautist. He then wrote several works for the Group for Contemporary Music, led by Charles Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger, and other ensembles.

*Chamber Piece No. 1 for Fourteen Instruments* was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Music Foundation and first performed at the Library of Congress, February 5, 1965, by the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Arthur Weisberg. Wolpe did not dedicate the piece to Webern, but there are clues that suggest it was an homage to his teacher. The first six bars of the piece are given in Example 6a. Except for two brief notes in the Piano (measures 2-3), the passage is formed entirely from the six pitches of Hexachord A (Example 6a).



Example 6a. Stefan Wolpe, *Chamber Piece No. 1*, Tone Material.



Example 6b. Stefan Wolpe, *Chamber Piece No. 1*, m. 90.  
© 1978, Southern Music Publishing Co. Courtesy, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Comparison with Webern's *Konzert* (Example 1a) reveals that both works are based on a similar collection of pitches. Wolpe did not limit the order of pitches to the tone row, but deployed them in any order. The second clue is the three-note figure in half notes that opens the piece: a descending leap in the French Horn (e-flat<sup>2</sup>, G) followed by an ascending leap to the Flute and Violin (b<sup>3</sup>). The three-note figure appears to be an expanded version of the three-note figure in the French Horn that begins the third movement of Webern's *Konzert* (Example 1d). The third clue occurs in bar 90 of the score, where Wolpe writes, "Oh Webern..." (Example 6b). But Webern is not the only composer mentioned in the score. A little further on, Wolpe cites Bartók's *Suite for Piano, Op. 14* next to a figure of sixteenth notes. Such references came from the desire to include many kinds of speech, from high style to vernacular. Music for Wolpe was very close to speech.



Example 6c. Stefan Wolpe, Chamber Piece No. 1, mm. 1-6.  
© 1978, Southern Music Publishing Co.

The first six bars are a study in montage (Example 6c). The French Horn announces the main three-note shape. After the Horn sounds  $e\text{-}flat^2$ , the Viola plucks the same pitch triple *forte* and the Cello bows the pitch and holds it, fading quickly to *pianissimo*. Then the Horn plays  $g$  and the Flute and two Violins play  $b^3$ . The instruments mix colours and textures, creating subtle blends. The Piano picks up on the Flute  $b^3$  with a four-pulse group of chords. The Flute and Violin extend  $b^3$  by adding the neighbour note  $c^4$ . The image sets up a contrast between an expansive three-note melodic figure and a tight cluster of chords. Image 2 (bar 4) is of four-note melodic figures in canon, but so close together that they stumble over each other. Image 3 answers Image 1 with another three-note figure in long notes: the figure descends in the Bassoon from  $g$  to  $B\text{-}flat$  and ascends to  $e^2$  in the Cello. Image 4 (bar 4-5) is a three-note chord

held by the Brass Trio for four beats and punctuated by Violin 2, which plucks the same chord. Above the chord, Oboe and Viola have a quiet six-note figure that continues the canon of Image 2. Images act and react, mutate and multiply as in a living organism. The edges are blurred, as when painters scrub colours to scumble edges.

Wolpe said of this music: "The Form is ripped endless open and self-renewed by interacting extremes of opposites. There is nothing to develop, because everything is already there in reach of one's ear's." The eight-minute, one-movement piece is like a large canvas with a great variety of images derived from a few basic shapes. The music exploits a wide range of dynamics and instrumental colours and thus differs from the flat surfaces of the Quartets of Cage and Feldman. In spatial depth, it is closer to a canvas by Franz Kline, Estéban Vicente or Jack Tworckov than one by Philip Guston. The resonance with the Webern *Konzert* continues with the many three-note figures and three-note chords that morph into four- and five-note shapes. The shapes take on different characters, contrasting modes of action that jostle, collide, separate, connect, surprise and shock. As Wolpe said, "The same musical idea is entertained in many different ways." Wolpe recalled Dada, and the play with montage, shock and simultaneity: "So many things are happening that you can move like in a landscape." The piece is a series of "ever-restored and ever-advancing moments" separated by pauses, some very brief, some longer, each moment as important as the next. Suddenly the Trumpet has a jazzy riff, and after a pause the riff is answered by the Flute, Oboe and two Violins. The ensemble is engaged in a group improvisation with all instruments playing an equal part. In the lecture "Thinking Twice," Wolpe wrote:

*Don't get backed too much in a reality which has fashioned your senses with too many realistic claims. When art promises you this sort of reliability, this sort of prognostic security, I say: Drop that baby! It is good to know how not to know how much one is knowing. One should know about all the structures of fantasy and all the fantasies of structures, and mix surprise and enigma, intelligence and abandon, form and antiform.*



Martin Brody interprets Wolpe's late music in light of Hannah Arendt's renunciation of sovereignty in favor of contingency and pluralistic activity, as models of action that convey freedom as a mode of being in its spontaneity and contingency. Wolpe held true to his socialist vision. While composing new works in complex style, even while suffering the effects of Parkinson's Disease, he took time to make arrangements of songs by Bertolt Brecht for Eric Bentley to sing while accompanying himself on the harmonium. To the end, Wolpe continued to square the circle between music for use in the world and music as a mode of being unto itself.

### About Austin Clarkson

With a B.A. in Science (U of T) and a master's degree (Eastman School of Music), I joined the Music Department of the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon) as assistant to composer and violinist Murray Adaskin. Three years later I enrolled at Columbia University on a Canada Council fellowship to study musicology. While earning the Ph.D., I helped found the journal *Current Musicology*, studied music privately with Stefan Wolpe, and met and married Wolpe's student, the composer Beverly Bond. We moved to New Haven with our two little boys, where I taught at Yale University for five years before returning to Toronto and joining the faculty of York University. When Wolpe died in 1972, little of his music was published, and his papers had been severely damaged by fire. With friends and colleagues we founded the Stefan Wolpe Society. After sorting and re-organizing the soiled and singed manuscripts, I prepared an inventory and catalogue of the Wolpe papers. In 1993 the Paul Sacher Foundation purchased the papers from Wolpe's widow, the poet Hilda Morley, where the process of restoration continues. Beginning in the 1980s, I interviewed friends, relatives, colleagues and students of Wolpe and edited an on-line series of "Recollections" ([www.wolpe.org](http://www.wolpe.org)). The original tapes and transcripts are now at the Oral History of American Music archive (Yale University). Together with a team of scholars and musicians I have seen into print critical editions of most of Wolpe's compositions and writings and some two-dozen recordings, one of which earned an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award. Among my publications: *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollections* (Pendragon Press); guest editorships of Wolpe issues of *Contemporary Music Review* (2008) and *Musik-Konzepte* (2010, 2011), and studies of Istvan Anhalt, John Cage, Ralph Shapey, David Tudor and Edgard Varèse, all of whom, including Wolpe, continue to be my teachers.

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Austin Clarkson

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