

## **On the practice of repeating concert items in concerts of modern or contemporary music: Historical precedents and recent contexts**

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### **Abstract:**

This article attempts to draw together a wide range of performing evidence between 1824 and 2005 concerning the repetition of new or unfamiliar music in concert performance. It makes no pretence at being exhaustive, but is a selective history of the phenomenon. Two types of repetition are highlighted: the immediate repetition of a concert item; and the repetition of a concert item on the same concert with other music placed between the two performances. Repetition in successive concerts, and repetition of an item across successive concert seasons, are also examined. The effects of all these practices on concert audiences are documented from available evidence as is, more briefly, the effect of mechanical repetition through the use of audio technology on the audience reception of new music. Certain patterns of audience reaction under all these circumstances are observed. In particular, a strong if not exclusive tendency towards enhanced audience comprehension of new music becomes consistently apparent when a work is repeated, even at the distance of some months. Composers are shown to be both preoccupied with and sensitive to the enhanced reception of their work made possible through repeated performance.

**Keywords:** Audiences; complexity; concerts; density; dissonance; enthusiasm; hostility; perception; reception; repetition

Like many composers, concern with audience reception of my music and of modern and contemporary music generally is a persistent if elusive factor of daily working practice. Some have reacted to this concern by changing the venue, venturing outside the concert hall – to clubs, warehouses, et al – for performances of what remains essentially concert

music. Although I have active contact with and am played on the so-called 'alternative venue' concert-giving scene in both the UK, the US and Scandinavia, my music is nevertheless predominantly performed in concert halls. The quality of audience reception to new music in concerts thus continues to be a strong area of interest to me and to many other practitioners and researchers. The practice of repeating items of modern or new music within a concert appears to be one of the few ready ways in which composers and their performers may give audiences a chance to assess new or unfamiliar work better and to deepen their listening experiences of it. It is therefore an area of continuing creative interest.

### **Repetition vs. Reproduction**

It is important to emphasise, in these days of internet and Spotify, that we are not predominantly concerned here with mechanical reproduction of musical performance via digital or other soft- or hardware. Such automated repeats are perceptually very different from a repeat in live performance: in these mechanical instances each performance characteristic, each mistake or playing idiosyncrasy is replicated exactly *ad infinitum*. However, a brief digression on this phenomenon is necessary here as it has a particular importance in the reception of new music, one which is still largely unrecognised. If a new work is rarely performed, a single recorded performance may, through repeated listening over many years, become inextricably confused with the work itself. There is at least one contemporary example of this under-researched phenomenon. *Gondwana* (1980) by French composer Tristan Murail (b.1947) is a fifteen-minute orchestral work, commonly regarded by new music enthusiasts as a contemporary classic and a key work of so-called 'spectral music'.<sup>1</sup> It has attracted the keen interest of a large number of composers and musicologists over many years, and has been very influential on a wide range of subsequent music. It is also a work of considerable performance difficulty: its notation employs several non-standard features, and often the orchestral players are required to place quarter-tones at a precise pitch with no preparation. Performances have therefore been rare. At its French premiere in December 1980, it required as much as nine hours of rehearsal plus a dress to be performed with satisfactory accuracy. This performance, broadcast by Radio France, was since distributed informally amongst the composer's admirers and eventually issued, and then re-issued on commercial CD.<sup>2</sup> It is also currently available on YouTube for free listening.<sup>3</sup> No other performance has been issued on CD.

Over approximately thirty-five years, the vast majority of those interested in *Gondwana* have been forced to listen repeatedly to the same single commercial performance of it. There is no doubt in my mind that this has affected the music and its reception. At a fine live performance of it in 2009 at the Barbican, a number of those present admitted to being considerably disconcerted that it sounded so different from the recording they had heard over many years. Although no change had been made to the full score since December 1980, they were startled that several passages appeared to balance very differently and even sound quite unexpected harmonically – due both to the Barbican

hall acoustics and because the BBC Symphony playing under Pascal Rophé in 2009 were infinitely more used to playing accurate quarter-tones than their French colleagues performing this music under the direction of Yves Prin in 1980. It is possible – from my knowledge of the work I would think it very likely – that the 2009 live performance was a more accurate and faithful rendition of this score than the 1980 recording. The cumulative result was that although all I spoke to agreed the work was to a considerable extent recognisable as the *Gondwana* they already knew from the recording, many passages surprised them both in overall impact and in details. Although having heard about five different broadcast or live performances of this work since 1983, and thus being more used to it as a performance phenomenon, I understood and to some extent shared the reactions of colleagues to hearing the work live. For me too, *Gondwana* had unavoidably become identified with its one commercial recording, heard many times privately and in seminars, and it was difficult to disengage it from that to hear it as a live performed work at all. This raises the intriguing question: is it *Gondwana* which has had a strong influence on so many subsequent composers, or its 1980 commercial recording which has had that influence? This question could just as appropriately be asked concerning the reception history of other classics of contemporary music with only a single commercial recording.

The rest of the present article will deal with repeated but non-identical live performances of new or modern music. It attempts to trace a history of such phenomena chronologically in Western concert giving from 1824 up to the present and to explain their presence where possible, but makes no pretence at being either encyclopaedic or exhaustive. I have selected instances of repeated live performance where they can be shown to have been initiated with the connivance of a composer (whether or not the composer of the work being repeated), especially where this involves a crucial work by a famous composer; or else to highlight issues of audience perception and reaction to what was then new in music in a particularly vivid way.

### **Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy**

The historical origins of the practice of repeating performances of modern or new concert music are hard to discern precisely. By the nineteenth century in Western European concerts it was quite customary to applaud between each movement of a symphonic or chamber work and, if the applause was especially warm, for the movement concerned to be immediately repeated before remaining movements were heard. According to an often repeated story, Beethoven complained that the audience had not asked for an encore of his long and complex finale, known as the *Grosse Fuge*, at the first performance of the original version of his String Quartet op.130, whereas they had encored the (on the surface) simpler second (scherzo) and fourth (*alla tedesca*) movements.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the reviews of the premiere exhibited overt bafflement at the fugal finale. Beethoven subsequently issued the *Grosse Fuge* as a separate piece, composing a new, much shorter and simpler alternative finale to his op.130 quartet after the premiere. In the case of the fugal finale, its considerable length, its relatively high density (complex, disjunct part-writing) and a

frequently marked degree of dissonance between the parts would appear to have cumulatively proved a barrier to the audience apprehending the work satisfactorily at a single hearing.

It seems no accident that the same players (the Schuppanzig Quartet) subsequently opted for a semi-private first performance of Beethoven's op.132 quartet at an inn before a select audience. Nor, surely, is it any accident that, by pre-announcement, the entire work was heard twice in succession, possibly because of its complexity and length: in fact its length specifically was remarked upon by at least one witness to this event. Nothing else was played on this occasion.<sup>5</sup> This is the earliest instance I have come across of a new work being deliberately performed twice by pre-arrangement at its premiere.

In these two instances with late Beethoven quartets, repeated performances - or the lack of them - have two quite different functions. In the concert of the op.130, the two movements repeated were those the audience had most immediately enjoyed – a clear expression of their immediate reactions to the music they heard. Whilst it is possible they might have understood the *Grosse Fuge* final movement better had they been given a second chance to hear it, it is evident from this incident that such was not the normal aim of repeated performance in a concert at this period, and it therefore seems doubly eloquent that the audience specifically avoided the opportunity to hear the *Grosse Fuge* again.<sup>6</sup> The semi-private premiere of op.132, on the other hand, has all the hallmarks of a different, exceptional occasion: the audience was not the general public but rather 'a numerous assembly of professors'. No single movement was encoered by popular demand – there presumably being no such thing by definition with such a select, specialist audience. On the other hand, the entire work was played twice, that comprising the whole concert. The repeat was therefore planned ahead of the concert. The implication of the repeated performance in this instance is clear: op.132 was deemed so demanding that even 'a numerous assembly of professors' would need to hear it twice in order to form some opinion on it.

From many contemporary reports, it is evident that individual movements of Brahms Symphonies were frequently encoered by audience demand at early performances of these works. Such was certainly the case with the first performance of Brahms' *Second Symphony* in 1877.<sup>7</sup> This practice slowly and irregularly ceased in concerts. By 1894 in Paris – just seventeen years later – the spontaneous encore of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* at its premiere at the Société Nationale on 22<sup>nd</sup> December that year appears to have caused some controversy with the critics reviewing the concert. The conductor, Gustave Doret, remembered that the premiere the work 'was a complete triumph, and I had no hesitation in breaking the rule forbidding encores. The orchestra were delighted to repeat this work, which it had come to love and which, thanks to them, the audience had now accepted.'<sup>8</sup> This makes it clear that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Paris and quite possibly elsewhere, the practice of spontaneous encores by audience demand at a premiere was frowned on to the extent of the Société Nationale having devised a rule expressly forbidding it. By the first decade of the twentieth century, both spontaneous and pre-planned repeats of new or

recent works would appear largely to have disappeared from Western concert life (except possibly in popular concerts of lighter repertoire).

Evidence of repeating modern or new music within the same concert – not only spontaneously (as in most of the instances just described) but also as a deliberate planned part of the concert concerned – reappears just after World War I, becoming increasingly apparent and prominent after World War II and continuing to today. The true origins of this practice, rather than in any of the incidents just described, may be said to date to two notorious events in European concert life before World War I.

### **Schoenberg (1)/Stravinsky (1)/Webern (1)**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1912, in a Promenade Concert in Queen's Hall, London, Henry Wood directed his Queen's Hall Orchestra in the world premiere of Arnold Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* op16, a classic example of the composer's so-called freely atonal or expressionist period of composition.<sup>9</sup> Although of unexceptional length (about twenty-five minutes), the five movements displayed a large number of startlingly novel features in both harmony, rhythm, texture and form by comparison with most music of the period. The public reception of this novelty was hostile: increasingly vocal unrest, boos and protests were evident both during the performance and immediately after it, as was widely reported in the press and in various memoirs of the incident.<sup>10</sup> The reviews ranged from bafflement to outright aggression.<sup>11</sup>

Schoenberg heard of the performance just before it happened, accidentally via an announcement in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>12</sup> By this time, aware that he was writing music which challenged performer and audience alike, he was taking increasing care to ensure that performances of his latest compositions were prepared under his personal supervision and that they took place in circumstances likely to be sympathetic to the music's reception. Schoenberg was thus angered that neither Peters Edition, who published the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, nor conductor Henry Wood took any steps to consult him in advance of the premiere of this major work which had already been rejected by no less a figure than Richard Strauss for his Berlin concerts as being too controversial to be presented to the public.<sup>13</sup> In the aftermath of the hostile public reaction to the Schoenberg, Henry Wood decided to organise a repeat performance of the *Five Orchestral Pieces* op.16 as soon as possible. This took place the following season, 1913-14, on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1914, and Wood invited Schoenberg to London to conduct it. Extra rehearsal time was allotted to the work, and a warning note was appended to the concert program stating that 'Herr Arnold Schoenberg has agreed to his co-operation in this concert on condition that during the performance of his *Five Orchestral Pieces* perfect silence is maintained.'<sup>14</sup>

This time the reception was quite different. The reviews, whilst still expressing some concern at Schoenberg's latest developments, readily conceded on repeat listening that the music was distinctly personal, very atmospheric and made considerable expressive impact. Indeed the reception by both public and critics to this repeat performance was so positive that at least one commentator has asserted it could have led to a lastingly sympathetic

following in Britain for the music of Schoenberg and his followers had World War I not intervened. As evidence of this, the same commentator cites a plan hatched by Henry Wood to mount the world premiere in the following Proms season of Anton Webern's *Five Orchestral Pieces* op.10, a work recommended to him by Schoenberg. The parts were being copied and the composer announced to Wood that they would soon be posted to him: this exciting plan was abandoned due to the arrival of the War.<sup>15</sup>

A similar chain of events was unfolding in Paris over the same period. The famous audience riot at the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* at the Theatre des Champs Elysees in May 1913 contrasts sharply with a hugely successful concert performance under the same conductor (Pierre Monteux) in Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1914 – a repeat performance after a similar time lag to the Schoenberg repeat performance in London. Once again both public and press reception of the repeat event contrasts very sharply with the original reactions. Whereas few were ready to credit the music at its premiere, at the repeat concert performance the audience went wild with enthusiasm and the press immediately acknowledged the superior status of the work.<sup>16</sup> In this case the complicating factor is that *The Rite of Spring*, being a ballet, did not have a single first performance but a first run. The work was given as a staged ballet four times in Paris, and three times in London, immediately after its premiere. The concert repeat performance was thus in reality the fifth the work had received in Paris in fifteen months. Many of those present at the concert repeat may well have heard the work at least once before, if not more times.<sup>17</sup> The process of audience assimilation may thus have been considerably accelerated in this instance.

These twin similar episodes clearly demonstrated that a repeat performance, even at a distance of several months (remembering that this was an era when most heard music solely in live performance and thus, in all likelihood, retained much stronger memory capacities for musical events), could make all the difference to the public's appreciation of the newest and most complicated music. Indeed, music at first deemed incomprehensible (even, at worst, not music at all) could by the second performance be assimilated with remarkable alacrity.

These episodes provide interesting historical parallels to more recent researches by Margulis and others on the phenomenon of repeated listening and its effects on listeners. Margulis reminds us that 'repetition itself can work to involve listeners with music in rich, new ways'<sup>18</sup> and that repeated listening may engender 'a steady and unconscious improvement in musical orientation, such that a person becomes more entrained with the piece without even realising it's happening'.<sup>19</sup> Both factors seem to have been at work in the episodes just recounted – indeed they appear to be rather vivid public enactments of just such a 'steady and unconscious improvement in musical orientation'. Many of the following incidents of planned concert repetition – most involving music relatively new at the time of performance – are likely to have been prompted by these well known and highly publicised incidents showing initial public hostility to new music giving way to expressions of comprehension, sympathy and enthusiasm towards it (both repeat performances taking place under significantly improved practical conditions, which may be no coincidence). It is

surely significant that the two composers involved in these key incidents – Schoenberg and Stravinsky – feature prominently in the subsequent history of the repeat performance of new music in concerts.

### **Schoenberg (2)/ Webern (2)**

In 1919 Schoenberg founded a private series of concerts for subscribers only, at which no applause was permitted and from which music critics were banned. The Society for Private Musical Performances (*Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen*) played modern music of all styles, excepting Schoenberg's own (which he embargoed from the series for some time). Indeed the repertoire was strikingly catholic, and predominantly not atonal – even when music by the Second Viennese School was performed, their early tonal works (which, admittedly, are often of great complexity) were often chosen.<sup>20</sup> In the light of his experience in London outlined above, it is no accident that Schoenberg chose to include repeated performances in these concerts. Three kinds of repeated performances featured frequently, all announced in advance on the printed programs:

- A) works played twice in the same concert, usually separated by other music (e.g. Debussy's *Cello Sonata*)
- B) works played more than once through the same season (e.g. Mahler's 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Stravinsky's *Five Easy Pieces*)
- C) works played in more than one (usually successive) season (e.g. Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*)

For our purposes, Category A) is the most relevant, since this appears to be one of the first appearances in the history of concert programming of pre-planned repeated performances of new music within the same programme. As already stated, many of these repeat performances were placed at some time distance in the concert program, often at the end.<sup>21</sup> However in a number of cases the repetition was immediate (and announced as such). In one single exceptional case, Webern's *Five Pieces for orchestra* op. 10 was heard three times in immediate succession.<sup>22</sup> Again, this was pre-announced.

Since no reviews were permitted, it is largely impossible to gauge the audience reception of these concerts. Nevertheless, they offer strikingly numerous historical precedents to the more recent practices of repeating modern or new music in concerts (either within the same concert, successive concerts or successive concert seasons), and it is worth noting that the practice was applied in these concerts not merely to works which were little played or unfamiliar but also to well-known works by Richard Strauss such as the *Alpine Symphony* (which, admittedly, was then relatively new).<sup>23</sup> Music of all styles was equally liable to be programmed in repeat performance: Erik Satie's piano music, which is both deliberately simple on the surface and often in itself repetitious, was repeated in the same concert just as more superficially elaborate music by Berg or Webern was.

### Webern (3)

The evidence just cited that Anton Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* op.10 were performed three times in succession on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1920 in Vienna suggests that the composer wished this particular work, consisting as it does of very short, sharply contrasted characteristic pieces, to be heard more than once in immediate succession when played in concert. Webern was, after all, heavily involved in the planning and execution of this private concert series in Vienna. This evidence is nicely backed up by a letter from Webern to the BBC music producer Edward Clark, in connection with the planning of a concert in London nine years later. One whole paragraph of this letter is devoted to these same *Five Pieces* op.10. The paragraph is worth quoting *in extenso* since it provides a rare insight into a composer's fervent hopes and aspirations for the success of his work vis-a-vis audience reception and the conditions under which he believes this may be obtained. He concentrates in particular on the delicate sound world of the third of his *Five Pieces*, which features – at a very reduced volume – tremolos and pulses on various sizes and types of bell sounds (including large untuned tubular bells, cowbells and celesta) within its orchestration:

[...] just this piece with the bells will sound especially beautiful on radio [...] I am perfectly convinced that it is all *radio-music*! Nothing can be more suitable for radio! [...] I would like above all else to do this piece. [...] If you had heard these pieces when I did them in Zurich! (everyone immediately wanted to hear this third piece with the bells again. Hence, a 'success', don't you think [...]) All these sounds are extremely delicate but very intense. *Lightly ff!!!* Therefore, as if created for radio.<sup>24</sup>

Evident here is both the composer's thoughtful attitude towards the enhanced audience appreciation a repeat performance of the third piece would have engendered ('everyone immediately wanted to hear this third piece with the bells again'), and also towards the enhanced quality of listening he imagines the radio broadcasting of this intimate and unusual musical texture would encourage. Webern emerges from this letter not as some recondite musician contemptuous of their audience but as a practical composer-conductor exceptionally eager to exploit new media (as radio then was) to share his sound vision with the audience and give them repeated chances to hear it under ideal conditions. This impression is reinforced by the information that during the resultant BBC radio concert (on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1929), conducted by the composer, Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* were duly performed twice in succession – though only the first of these two performances was broadcast on radio.<sup>25</sup> The current practice (see penultimate section, below) of immediately repeating these pieces in concert thus has the direct sanction of the composer himself.



## Stravinsky (2)

There is little further evidence of repeat performances of modern or new music within the same concert or successive concerts until the late 1940s, when the practice suddenly re-emerged in American concert life. The first instance I have found took place in a New York concert on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1948, featuring the first performances of Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in its revised form.<sup>26</sup> The work was conducted by the composer, and the immediately repeated performance was printed in the concert programme.<sup>27</sup> I have found nothing in the reviews indicating a specific reaction to the work's repetition on the programme. In its original version, the work had a turbulent performance history with largely unsympathetic audience reactions and uncomprehending reviews.<sup>28</sup> One suspects the repeated performance of *Symphonies* on this occasion was specifically designed to counteract that history of audience incomprehension. At the time of its composition in 1920-1, and even of its revision in 1948, the block-like form of the work must have seemed strangely discontinuous, and its sonorous orchestration's many unusual instrumental combinations have retained their novelty even now. However by 1948, Stravinsky was a senior composer of world fame and there was little likelihood that any work of his would be greeted with anything less than seriousness and respect, as proved to be the case on this occasion.

## Stravinsky (3)

The world premiere of Stravinsky's *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* for tenor, string quartet and four trombones occurred in Los Angeles at the Monday Evening Concerts of modern music, on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1954. The concert contained two planned performances of Stravinsky's work, one just before the interval, one just after. Framing it were examples of Baroque polyphony by Gabrieli, Willaert, Purcell, Schutz and Gesualdo. A eulogy in Dylan Thomas's memory spoken by Aldous Huxley, followed by recordings of Thomas reading several of his own poems including 'Do not go gentle into that good night' – the same poem set by Stravinsky in his memorial to Thomas – preceded the first of the two Stravinsky performances. The concert ended with Bach's cantata *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*.

A clear intention here was to set Stravinsky's new work in an appropriate musical and aesthetic context.<sup>29</sup> This was his first substantial foray into composition with note rows: all the pitches in it are derived from a five note row announced at the opening and there is much use of canonic and imitative writing. Although this might suggest that its immediate ancestry lay in the music of Schoenberg (and at least one prominent commentator received it as such)<sup>30</sup>, the concert did not include any work by that composer, about whose music Stravinsky remained ambivalent. By placing Stravinsky's new work next to polyphony by Gesualdo, Schutz and others, much of it featuring canonic or imitative writing, the audience's attention was drawn to the historical precedents for Stravinsky's new piece, to suggest that its true ancestry lay with the earlier polyphony in which the composer was deeply immersed at the time, rather than in any more recent music.

This demonstrates a vital new function of the repeat performance. The repeat may serve not merely to aid the audience's comprehension of unfamiliar music. It may also serve to determine the audience's contextualisation of the new music by reference to the other (here much older) music around it. The repetition of the new Stravinsky work after the interval – placing it in the concert programme directly adjacent to music by Gesualdo and Bach – served to reinforce its multiple connections with the earlier composers. Such, evidently, was Stravinsky's intention, and from the evidence of the enthusiastic reception the new work received, it would appear that the concert succeeded in this aim.<sup>31</sup>

### **A Composer Composes Their Own Repeat Performance (1)**

Stockhausen's *Piano Piece XI* (1956) consists of nineteen musical fragments displayed on a single large sheet of paper. The composer's instructions to the performer explain that the music starts with any fragment, at the end of which the performer moves to any other fragment, and so forth. If a previously played fragment is performed a second time, the performer must apply various changes of octave register and other alterations indicated in brackets which will render it notably different. If a fragment is landed upon a third time, the piece ends. The composer instructs that *Piano Piece XI* must be performed twice in any one concert.

*Piano Piece XI* is thus an extreme case of an 'open form'. Any two performances are not likely to either start or finish the same way, and not all the musical fragments provided will necessarily be played. The duration of the piece will vary considerably from one performance to the next. The crucial factor, for our purposes, of the compulsory repeat performance in the same concert has an interesting role in playing on the listener's memory. It is clear that under these circumstances, the 'repeat performance' will certainly not be a literal repeat performance. Fragments of music played in the first performance may well recur in the second but due to the random order, the aural memory of each listener is bound to be considerably challenged and recognition is by no means guaranteed. Furthermore, since the speed of each successive fragment is determined by tempo indications given at the end of the previously played fragment, even if a fragment is repeated in the second performance, it is likely to be played at a different speed. Musical fragments not played the first time may well be heard in the second performance, adding new information and context to those repeated more or less literally.

Within our context, it is also worth emphasising that the composer has ensured that even within a single performance, fragments are not literally repeated if played twice (as already explained). The musical style of all fragments in *Piano Piece XI* avoids any kind of short-term repetition of pulse or musical figure; changes of texture and register, even within single fragments, are common. This reinforces the overall impression that one aim is to consistently challenge the listener's aural memory in both short and long term. Some approximate resemblances are possible, both between any pair of performances within the same concert, and of fragments repeated within a single performance. But the composer

has ensured that these are strictly limited and, in general, adjacent performances of this work tend to sound strikingly unlike, except in general style.<sup>32</sup>

### **Copland: Audience Sympathy/Hostility**

Four years later, back in New York, a different world premiere incorporated a repeat performance. The work was Aaron Copland's *Piano Fantasy*, commissioned by the Juilliard School. This major work (lasting about thirty minutes) was premiered by William Masselos, who had worked under Copland's close supervision, at the Juilliard on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1957. The *Fantasy* was recognised by its composer as a challenging work which would not have the immediate appeal of his popular wartime folk-influenced scores such as *Rodeo* or *Appalachian Spring*.<sup>33</sup> Both the *Fantasy's* length and its dissonant, partly serial pitch language, seem to have prompted the unusual format of the concert. The *Piano Fantasy* was performed with no other music. The first half comprised the world premiere. After an intermission, the *Piano Fantasy* was performed complete a second time. This was announced in advance on the concert programme and on the invitations to the concert as well.<sup>34</sup> The audience which attended the event knew that if they stayed to the end, they would hear the *Piano Fantasy* twice and nothing else. The applause at the conclusion of the concert nevertheless included prominent boos, though these were not a protest against the work, but against Copland's perceived musical conservatism. They were uttered by the experimental composer Morton Feldman, who later explained his reasons to Copland (whilst asking the senior composer for a reference).<sup>35</sup>

As so often at this period, it is hard to judge from available evidence what effect the repeated performance of this new work had on either the audience or the critics, though it was certainly taken very seriously and the reviews were warm, perhaps exceptionally so given the challenging nature of the new work. Yet the very fact of the repeat performance, contextually, is significant. By 1957, Aaron Copland was indisputably America's leading composer, a figure of international stature long signed with the leading publisher Boosey and Hawkes and a Pulitzer Prize winner. If Copland, by this stage in his career, felt the need to have an ambitious new work immediately repeated at its world premiere, this signified his concern that it was going to need special attention from its audience – even though the audience which turned up contained many professional composers and musicians familiar with his whole output, as Copland must have realised it would.

The repeat premiere performance of the Copland *Piano Fantasy* proved a percipient move on the composer's part: his two next major premieres, both unrepeated, provoked the type of hostile audience reaction he would have hoped, by now, to be a thing of the past. At the world premiere of Copland's *Orchestral Variations* in January 1958 in Louisville, this extrovert, dissonant piece (an orchestration of his *Piano Variations* from 1930) was badly received. The original work, lasting about eleven minutes, was a bold example of modernism which had been rejected as unsuitable for public performance by its intended performer Walter Gieseking.<sup>36</sup> The new orchestral version - brash, percussive and often loud - shocked the Louisville audience at its premiere into vocal protests, to the surprise of

its composer.<sup>37</sup> Only two years later in 1960, Copland's new *Connotations* for orchestra, another product of his most dissonant style composed to open the Lincoln Center in New York, stunned its gala concert audience into near silence and, being televised live, provoked protests from the wider public ('Dear Mr. Copland, Shame! Shame! Shame!' read one letter), as well as reducing First Lady Jackie Kennedy to unaccustomed near inarticulacy backstage.<sup>38</sup> Both of these events and their dysfunctional audience receptions contrast strikingly with the sympathetic reception and reviews accorded to the same composer's arguably more challenging *Piano Fantasy* in 1957.

Thus it is unsurprising that composers and performers increasingly realised that repeat performances of a work could be highly beneficial, whether in effecting audience comprehension of new or unfamiliar music, in enhancing the level of performance (through giving performers a second go at it right away) and/or in putting such music into some kind of coherent musical context, as in the Stravinsky Hollywood concert from 1954 cited above.

### **Stravinsky (4)**

Stravinsky, indeed, made something of a habit of the practice in later years. This was made possible by the increasing time compression of each new work he composed: many were only a few minutes long, but of great musical variety and density. In the case of the orchestral *Variations (Aldous Huxley in memoriam)* of 1964, Stravinsky managed to fit an introduction, ten variations and a coda into just over five minutes. Both at its premiere in Chicago and several subsequent performances in Stravinsky's presence, the *Variations* were performed twice in immediate succession. At least one of these immediately repeated performances was televised – the UK premiere by the New Philharmonia Orchestra under Robert Craft, filmed for BBC2 and broadcast live on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1965.<sup>39</sup> Several eyewitnesses to whom I have spoken vividly recall the impact this lively and eventful new work had through being played twice in succession.<sup>40</sup> Neither this work, nor its repeat performance, were announced in the advanced publicity, and even in the printed concert programme there was apparently some confusion as to both the repertoire, the order of pieces to be played and who would be conducting them.<sup>41</sup>

### **A Composer Composes Their Own Repeat Performance (2)**

Brian Ferneyhough's *Funérailles* for 7 strings and harp exists in two versions, named 'A' and 'B' in the published score, completed in 1977 and 1980 respectively. The composer instructs that both versions are to be played in the same concert (in chronological order) but not immediately next to each other.

The two versions of *Funérailles* have many resemblances. In Version B, each musical gesture of Version A is reworked and overlaid with numerous new details. The order of events is not variable (unlike in the Stockhausen *Piano Piece XI*) and in addition some passages, notably the opening and conclusion, are pretty near identical. Again, the composer seems to be deliberately playing upon the listener's memory of musical events

but here the degree of resemblance between the two versions is constantly varied not by the performer (as in the Stockhausen piece) but by the composer. This ingenious idea, unique in musical literature as far as is known, shows an intense awareness by the composer of the role both context and memory play in the reception of their music. The instruction that the two versions are to be heard only separated by other music ensures that immediate comparison is not possible and that other music will be overlaid in the listener's memory. Yet the degree of composed resemblance between the two versions is such that a considerable amount of aural recognition by a listener seems probable, despite the complex and changeable textures of both. *Funérailles* marks an important step in composer engagement with the question of repeat performance as a factor of comprehension and communication.<sup>42</sup>

### **Oliver Knussen/Carter/Stravinsky (5)/Webern (4)**

One of those who watched the Stravinsky concert live on BBC2 in 1965 was the composer-conductor Oliver Knussen, then thirteen years old. Struck by the effectiveness of the immediately repeated performance, and the enhanced impact this had on his own appreciation of the new work, Knussen subsequently adopted the practice with some frequency in his own concerts. Generally, Knussen has adopted this practice either when conducting one of the short late Stravinsky compositions (including the *Variations*), or when conducting some other composition of short duration. In each instance Knussen's repetition of the work concerned has been decided spontaneously rather than announced to the audience in advance, and therefore it has always been immediate. The UK premiere of Elliott Carter's *A Celebration of Some 150x100 Notes* (an exuberant, fanfare-like orchestral composition lasting barely 3 minutes) at the 1988 Aldeburgh Festival was immediately repeated. Both performances received a warm audience reaction, the second especially so – indicating, to this listener at least, that the repeat had distinctly enhanced the audience's comprehension of this exciting and busy music. The concert was broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, complete with the spontaneous repetition and enthusiastic audience reactions.

In other concerts, such spontaneous repetition of music has had unexpected consequences. In 1994, again at the Aldeburgh Festival, a concert of late Stravinsky culminated in a moving performance of the composer's last major work, *Requiem Canticles*.<sup>43</sup> Like all his later music, this piece is relatively short (about 15 minutes) and musically concentrated. When Knussen announced that he now planned to repeat the work, a number of the audience got up to leave, a disappointing reaction to such a solemn and haunting work.

On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005, Knussen made a similar spontaneous repeat performance of Anton Webern's *Five Orchestral Pieces* op.10, within a concert by the London Sinfonietta at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. He gestured manually to indicate that a spontaneous repetition would immediately ensue – as many in the audience were by now expecting, given Knussen's known tendency to immediately repeat shorter works such as this. The audience reception of the repeat performance was warm and prolonged applause.

However one listener, a newspaper music critic, didn't realise that the work was being repeated at all, and made his ignorance of this fact evident in his published review by criticising the audience for applauding in the middle of the work, as he thought. This very public mistake evoked widespread ridicule on the internet from those who attended and was widely remarked upon.

One has little sympathy for someone agreeing to function professionally as a music critic to a modern music concert with both so little evident knowledge of an acknowledged classic of that repertoire and with what would appear to be a very limited capacity for remembering such repertoire, even after only a few minutes. However the particular style of the Webern *Five Pieces* op.10 may at least partially explain, though not excuse, this major error. Since these same features may also explain why the work was played three times in a row in Vienna in January 1920, why the composer wished that at least one movement had been encored in Zurich a few years later, and why he played them twice in succession at their UK premiere in 1929, they are worth elucidating briefly here.

1) The whole work is very short (a little more than five minutes in total) and each movement is therefore also brief. Brevity is taken to an extreme in the fourth piece, which lasts barely ten seconds and is only one score page long. 2) The pitch syntax of the work is consistently dissonant, avoiding all consonances such as octaves, fifths, triads as well as the more common dissonant chords of late tonal syntax such as diminished chords, etc. Thus by the standards of concert music in 1913-14, the majority of the work would have used a pitch syntax with which few would have been familiar. 3) The work features very quickly changing and often fragmentary melodic figures, harmonies, timbres and motifs passed swiftly between instruments. In the context of the present article, an especially significant feature may be that in four of these five pieces, literal or approximate repetition of musical material is notably avoided.<sup>44</sup>

That this lack of repetition was no accident becomes readily apparent in the somewhat longer third piece of op.10, where the musical texture is constant, largely stable and features several *ostinati* of both rhythm and pitch in the aural foreground (it is the 'third piece with the bells' referred to by Webern in the letter quoted above). This atmospheric and repetitive music, placed at the centre of the work, is so unlike the rest of the five pieces in both texture and mood, and so stable in itself, that a first time listener may reasonably be expected to recognise it a few minutes later without effort. Whilst it is interesting that the Zurich audience in the 1920s told Webern that it was this piece they wished to have repeated (though it was not on that occasion), as with the Beethoven op.130 premiere the audience picked for possible repetition by far the simplest music in Webern's op.10, whereas the other movements might have become much clearer to them on second hearing precisely because they avoid the surface repetitions of the third piece. This reinforces the implication evident elsewhere in this article that a simpler and more repetitive musical surface will often be easier to absorb on first hearing.

With regard to the newspaper review of the London Sinfonietta concert in December 2005, however, one is forced to conclude that the critic concerned, whose review expresses

overt impatience with the audience (derided by him as ‘pseud-heavy’), must have allowed his irritation with the event as a whole to distract him from listening to the music being played.<sup>45</sup>

### **Towards a scientific assessment of repetition in concerts**

Although recent years have seen increased research by Margulis and others on the effects of repetition on the listener, further data with regard to the effects of repetition, particularly in the context of new or unfamiliar music, and on the effects of repetitions as heard in actual concert situations, are urgently needed. For this reason, the empirical study by Halpern, Sloboda, Chan and Müllensiefen of exactly these areas (in a linked paper in this volume) – study in which I have been involved in an advisory capacity (and also as supervisor of some of the composers involved) – are, I believe, of exceptional importance and wide potential interest. It is to be hoped that, following this, further work will be done to accumulate and analyse data on this fascinating aspect of concert giving and audience reception. Repeating a work remains one of the most important tools in determining the quality of listening that an audience may accord to music with which it is not familiar. Using repeat performances, composers may have justified hope to effect a ‘steady and unconscious improvement in musical orientation’ amongst their audiences.<sup>46</sup>

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> For more on spectral music, see Fineberg (2000).

<sup>2</sup> The latest re-issue was Murail (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Currently available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Elx0XzPzg> [accessed on 16/12/2016].

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Solomon (1977), p. 447. According to this story, Beethoven's reaction on hearing of the unfavourable reception accorded to the Grosse Fuge was 'And why didn't they encore the Fuge? That alone should have been repeated. Cattle! Asses!' The concert took place in Vienna on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1826, played by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, to whose 2<sup>nd</sup> Violinist Karl Holz Beethoven is said to have spoken these remarks after the performance.

<sup>5</sup> See the report by the visiting British musician Sir George Smart, quoted in Cooper (1970) p. 71:

'There was a numerous assembly of professors to hear Beethoven's second new manuscript quartette... This quartette is three-quarters of an hour long. They played it twice.'

<sup>6</sup> This has parallels with some reactions noted in Andrea Halpern's article, namely that those who do not enjoy a work at first hearing are sometimes reluctant to hear it again, a reluctance which may hinder their further appreciation of the work on repeat.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, the letter from Ferdinand Pohl to Brahms' publisher Simrock, written between 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September 1877, during rehearsals for the premiere and immediately after it: '[...]The work is splendid and will be quickly accepted. The 3<sup>rd</sup> movement has its da capo already in the



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bag[...]’; and later, following the premiere, ‘Model performance, warmest reception. 3<sup>rd</sup> movement (Allegretto) da capo, repeated calls for more.’ In both of these quotations, the phrase ‘da capo’ refers to the immediate repeat performance of the whole movement. Letter quoted in Brinkmann (1995) p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Nichols (1992) p. 48. In his biography of Debussy, Nichols comments that ‘The critics, needless to say, resented the way in which an encore had attempted to render them redundant [...]’ See Nichols (1998) p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> For further details of this event and (some of) its immediate reception, see Lambourn (1987).

<sup>10</sup> See Lambourn (1987) p. 423.

<sup>11</sup> See Lambourn (1987) p. 422-3.

<sup>12</sup> See Lambourn (1987) p. 422.

<sup>13</sup> See letter from Strauss to Schoenberg quoted in Simms (2000) p. 73. Interestingly, this letter went on to suggest that Schoenberg have the music tried out in private, without any audience present, the implication being (as Simms points out) not only that no audience would tolerate such music but that Schoenberg himself was not sufficiently aware of its likely sound in performance.

<sup>14</sup> See Lambourn (1987) p. 425.

<sup>15</sup> See Lambourn (1987) p. 426-7.

<sup>16</sup> For reviews of both the first ballet production and the later concert premiere, see Lesure (1980) pp.15-52.

<sup>17</sup> In addition, as is customary for a stage work, the dress rehearsal before the world premiere was held in front of an invited audience - many of the critics in reality attended not the riotous premiere but this dress rehearsal. Interestingly, the dress rehearsal was apparently well received. See Walsh (2000) p.203.

<sup>18</sup> See Margulis (2014) p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> See Margulis (2014) p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> For further details of this Society, see Metzger and Riehn (1984). All subsequent details regarding repeat performances in this series are taken from this volume, which has a complete list of all concerts and repertoire in the Society’s history (see *op. cit.*, pp. 101-118).

<sup>21</sup> For example, on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1921 the programme comprised: Satie *Three Piano Pieces*; Stravinsky *Piano-Rag-Music*; Webern *Four Pieces for violin and piano*; Busoni *Toccata*; Stravinsky *Piano-Rag-Music* (repetition).

<sup>22</sup> Concert of 30<sup>th</sup> January 1920. The programme comprised: Szymanowski *Romances for violin and piano* op.23; Webern *Five Pieces for orchestra* op.10 (three performances); Satie *Three Piano Pieces* (two performances).

<sup>23</sup> In all cases of compositions requiring orchestral forces, the music was performed in arrangements for piano duet, for 2 or more pianos (as in the cases of Mahler symphonies or the Strauss *Alpine Symphony*) or for small mixed chamber ensembles (as in the cases of Mahler *Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen* or the Webern op.10). Where arrangements did not previously exist, they were made specially by Schoenberg, Webern, Erwin Stein and Hanns Eisler.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Doctor (1999) p. 171. I quote it in the translation provided within the book. The original German is not provided.

<sup>25</sup> See Doctor (1999) p. 175, on evidence provided by press reviews of the concert.

<sup>26</sup> The work was originally premiered in London at the Queen’s Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1921.

<sup>27</sup> See Walsh (2006), p. 223.

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<sup>28</sup> For details, see Walsh (2000), pp. 300-333.

<sup>29</sup> The series director Lawrence Morton also alleged that Stravinsky 'liked very much having his own works performed in the context of old music rather than new music.' See Crawford (1995) p. 150. See also Walsh (2006), p. 323.

<sup>30</sup> See Keller (1955) pp. 13-20.

<sup>31</sup> For further details of the concert and its successful reception, see Crawford (1995), pp. 148-151.

<sup>32</sup> For all details of performance practice for *Piano Piece XI*, see Stockhausen (1956).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Copland's article on this composition for the New York Times (Music Page, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1957) of which the MS draft is viewable at:

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/copland.writ0019.0/?sp=1&st=gallery>

<sup>34</sup> For details of the premiere concert, its audience and the newspaper reviews of this event, see Pollack (1999), p. 484.

<sup>35</sup> See Pollack (1999) p. 484 for Feldman's booing the premiere, and p.205 for Feldman's letter to Copland explaining and requesting a reference.

<sup>36</sup> See Copland and Perlis (1994), p. 179. Giesecking's letter read in part, 'I do not know an audience which would accept such crude dissonances without protesting.' The premiere was in consequence given by Copland himself.

<sup>37</sup> See Copland/Perlis (1994) pp. 183-4 for accounts of the hostile audience reaction at this premiere, in newspaper reviews with headlines such as 'New-Old Copland Work Cheered, Also Jeered.'

<sup>38</sup> See Pollack (1999) pp. 500-1 and pp. 652-3 for various accounts of audience reactions and newspaper reviews. Jackie Kennedy's on camera reaction to *Connotations* was to say to the composer, repeatedly, 'Oh Mr. Copland!', and nothing else. Copland innocently enquired of his concert companion Verna Fine, who witnessed the incident, what this could mean. 'Aaron it's obvious: she hated it!' Fine replied bluntly.

<sup>39</sup> For further details of this event, see Walsh (2006), pp. 512-13. Following the two performances of the Stravinsky *Variations*, the composer himself conducted the final item in the concert, the 1945 *Firebird Suite*. The film of this last item has since been commercially released on DVD.

<sup>40</sup> Private conversations with three individuals who watched the concert live on BBC2, heard it live on BBC radio and who attended it live at the Royal Festival Hall.

<sup>41</sup> See Walsh (2006), p. 512.

<sup>42</sup> See Ferneyhough (1981).

<sup>43</sup> Premiered in October 1966. As is well known, despite its dedication to Helen Buchanan Seeger (whom Stravinsky had never met), this work was almost certainly Stravinsky's memorial to himself. It was duly performed at his funeral in Venice, April 1971.

<sup>44</sup> With one exception: a falling minor ninth on the trombone features at identical pitch level and similar speed once each in both movements 2 (bar 7) and 4 (bars 3-4) of the op.10 pieces. Since it is exposed in both appearances, it is quite possible that even a listener unfamiliar with the work or its style may notice this single instance of literal recurrence across movements in the work even at first hearing.

<sup>45</sup> See Holden (11<sup>th</sup> December 2005) end of ninth paragraph. Most unfortunately under the circumstances, Holden described the Webern op.10 pieces as 'the only piece in the program [the audience] might have been expected to know', their premature applause half way through it (as Holden in error imagined) being used as definitive proof of the audience being 'pseud-heavy'. In reality, of course, Holden's own lack of knowledge of a modern classic was bluntly revealed. The

entire review may be accessed at the following website:

[https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/dec/11/classicalmusicandopera.](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/dec/11/classicalmusicandopera)

<sup>46</sup> See Margulis, *op. cit.*, p. 106.