

TEMPORAL AND HARMONIC CONCERNS  
IN THE MUSIC OF ROBERT CARL

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by  
DANIEL ERIC MOREL

B.A., Bucknell University, 2003  
B.A., Bucknell University, 2003  
M.M., The Hartt School, University of Hartford, 2011  
A.D., The Hartt School, University of Hartford, 2013

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TEMPORAL AND HARMONIC CONCERNS  
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Daniel Eric Morel, Candidate for the Master of Music in Musicology

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ABSTRACT

Robert Carl is a composer-critic based in Hartford, Connecticut. His hyphenated career has involved creating, teaching, and commenting on music for the latter half of the twentieth century up to the present. Initially trained as a historian, Carl has maintained a keen interest in modern musical trends while developing his own distinct musical language. His music fuses stylistic and conceptual influences that bleed through aesthetic boundaries, making it difficult to label or associate with other composers. While the result is not a stereotypical postmodern pastiche of the past, his music does embrace a pluralism of historical and current methods in ways characteristic of a composer keenly interested in modern American culture. Moreover, Carl's music relates to stylistic developments within late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American art music. Studying his music helps reveal overall trends within contemporary American art music. This thesis introduces Robert Carl through a biographical sketch and examines the development of time-based and harmonic concerns within his works.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance have examined a thesis titled “TEMPORAL AND HARMONIC CONCERNS IN THE MUSIC OF ROBERT CARL” presented by Daniel Morel, candidate for the Master of Music degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Andrew Granade, Ph.D. Committee Chair  
Conservatory of Music and Dance

William Everett, Ph.D.  
Conservatory of Music and Dance

Reynold Simpson, D.M.A.  
Conservatory of Music and Dance

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## DEDICATION

To Kelly, my inspiration to be better.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Robert Carl is a composer-critic based in Hartford, Connecticut, where he teaches at The Hartt School. His hyphenated career has involved creating, teaching, and commenting on music for the latter half of the twentieth century up to the present. Initially trained as a historian, Carl has maintained a keen interest in modern musical trends while developing his own distinct musical language. Despite recognition from groups as prestigious as the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Endowment for the Arts, his music has not received widespread attention.<sup>1</sup> This may be a byproduct of the openness Carl brings to his own musical language, a fusion of stylistic and conceptual influences that bleed through aesthetic boundaries, making it difficult to label or associate with other composers. While the result is not a stereotypical postmodern pastiche of style, his music does embrace a pluralism of historical and current methods in ways characteristic of a composer keenly interested in modern American culture.<sup>2</sup> Representing his output under an umbrella of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Carl's awards include the C.D. Jackson Award at Tanglewood (1979), an Individual Artist Grant from the National Endowment for Arts (1980), a Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1998), a Copland Award (1999), a Chamber Music America commission (2005), and an Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2016).

<sup>2</sup> The Ashgate Research collections on late 20<sup>th</sup> century music adopt no capitalization when referencing modernism, postmodernism, minimalism, and postminimalism. I am adopting the same convention for this thesis.

openness may best encapsulate the many features found in his works, including attention to space, pluralism, and temporality. Carl achieves these ideas in his music through an application of various techniques rooted in twentieth century musical developments linked to his teachers and influential composers.

Carl's music deserves more scholarly attention because of its relation to prominent trends in American art music. His music shares characteristics with that of more recognized contemporaries but also extends into realms different from the most prominent of current American composers. This chapter discusses those characteristics and the path that led him to choose those traits within his music.

### *Biography*

The best place to start looking at Robert Carl's music is to understand his background. Robert Bradford Carl was born on July 12, 1954, in Bethesda, Maryland, to Robert Arthur Carl, an aviation engineer, and Ruth Miller Carl, a technical editor. Young Robert did not receive a rigorous musical education until college; however, his musical output is tied to seeming coincidences of time, place, and family, a synchronicity that can be seen in his childhood through graduate school. It is no wonder the composer who shares a birthday with Thoreau (also the subject of Ruth Carl's thesis for a Masters in English) is so driven by extra-musical concerns in his compositions.

Carl spent the majority of his youth in Atlanta, Georgia, where his family moved in 1957 in order for his father to take a job fatigue testing aviation gear for Lockheed. His mother, who previously worked for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the federal agency preceding NASA), stayed home and cared for Robert. Growing up in the South during the centennial of America's Civil War imprinted deeply on the already

historically-minded Robert Carl. Carl acknowledges as a kid he “only wanted to read history books... my initial reading habits as a kid were history books.”<sup>3</sup> He was a Civil War buff and would travel with his parents to battlefields across the eastern seaboard of the United States. His interest in those historical footprints were not merely for the historical narrative – who died and how they died. Carl does not recall “running around [the battlefields] imagining gore and severed limbs.”<sup>4</sup> Instead, his interest was more aesthetic, insofar as a young boy is capable of understanding:

...something very mysterious about the sense of what happened then and what it is like now and there’s these very small concretizations of the past that are in a landscape and I found that – to this day – I find that very very evocative and moving.<sup>5</sup>

The fascination with history that manifested in these childhood trips continued to grow throughout Robert Carl’s life. An avid reader, he gravitated toward numerous cultural, political, and intellectual threads in America’s past. These historical connections continued to blossom during his undergraduate and graduate studies at Yale University, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Chicago. For a time, his interest in history even outweighed his musical aptitude. Were it not for attending Yale in the 1970s, it is possible his life could have taken a different direction. Ultimately, his collegiate studies led him down a path where his interest in history fused with musical concerns, both in the music he wrote and his work as a writer.

Robert Carl’s father and maternal grandmother passed along a great enthusiasm for music. Carl recalls learning to love classical music from listening to his father’s record

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with composer, 2016-11-06.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with composer, 2016-11-06.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with composer, 2016-11-06.

collection (particularly a love for Mahler). His first purchases were recordings of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos and Elliott Carter's first two string quartets, and he eventually added a recording of Charles Ives's *Three Places in New England*. Except for a few modernist works in his collection, Carl regarded classical music in a historical context: as a fixed body of music to be appreciated but with little room for additions. Despite his growing interest in music, his training as a musician was limited. His high school education included access to piano lessons and choral singing. Carl's belief that there was little room for new expression in music changed when he arrived at Yale.

Carl began his undergraduate studies at Yale in 1972. He pursued a degree in history and studied music on the side. He began to rethink his view of classical music as a fixed body of work in his sophomore year and credits this shift to Charles Ives. Ives's centennial was in 1974, and Yale celebrated with numerous performances. Carl heard a variety of Ives's orchestra and chamber music, including John Kirkpatrick playing the Concord Sonata. Carl heard a sense of freedom in these works he had not experienced before. He heard music "unafraid to have rough edges," music that appeared messy on the surface. Most importantly, he heard music that invited young composers to contribute in their own way.<sup>6</sup> Carl felt a permission from this experience to write his own music and develop his compositional skills.

It is worth noting that Carl's connection to Ives and his music is deeper than the music itself. Though not immediately evident during his time at Yale, Robert Carl has continued to identify with the rugged individualism and transcendental philosophies that characterized and influenced Charles Ives. This connection permeates Carl's music and writings to this day. His friend and former *Village Voice* critic Kyle Gann has even gone so

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with composer, 2016-11-06.

far as to give Carl the title “Southern Transplant in New England” in reference to Carl’s physical and philosophical connections – a mantle Carl happily wears.

Carl’s musical and philosophical connection to Ives prompted him to study music in earnest while completing his degree in history. He studied theory and composition under Jonathan Kramer and Robert Morris, and he learned from visiting composers such as Toru Takemitsu and Krzysztof Penderecki. Carl credits Kramer as his most influential teacher “above all because he just took me seriously,” and helped Carl explore that freedom he heard in the music of Charles Ives.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this growing interest and encouragement that led to his current life as composer and critic, Carl does not discount his history studies at Yale. He is proud of his work with preeminent historian C. Vann Woodward studying post-Civil War politics of the American South.<sup>8</sup> This appreciation for historical study is apparent in Carl’s earlier compositions and continues to provide a filter for his writings.

His crowning achievement as a composer at Yale was winning the school’s symphonic composition competition in 1975. The competition was open to all Yale undergraduates, and Carl submitted *Raptures*, an orchestral work with Transcendentalist inspiration that in hindsight he considers “a cop of the Ives Fourth Symphony but condensed into ten minutes.”<sup>9</sup> However, that success was enough to convince Carl to set aside aspirations for law school and pursue graduate study.

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<sup>7</sup> Email exchange with composer, 2018-02-08.

<sup>8</sup> Email exchange with composer, 2018-02-08. Carl wrote a senior thesis under the guidance of Woodward examining the development of the Populist Party, an American political party that existed from 1891 to 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with composer, 2016-11-06.

Robert Carl's musical aspirations and skills led him to the University of Pennsylvania. He enrolled in the Masters of Music program in 1976, studying primarily with George Rochberg. Carl was enamored with Rochberg's Third String Quartet, "with its historical program, which in a sense created a sort of meta-history."<sup>10</sup> Leonard Meyer was also teaching at Penn, and his research on style evolution greatly affected Carl. He considers Meyer "one of the finest and most original [aestheticians]."<sup>11</sup> His studies with Meyer and Rochberg undoubtedly helped Carl develop a critical understanding of aesthetics while maintaining a postmodern sense of equality among styles.

Carl continued his graduate education at the University of Chicago in 1978, studying with Ralph Shapey. The disjunctive gestures and angular melodies in Shapey's music can be found in Carl's music, though it is clear Carl inherited more than just "Shapeyesque pitch usage" from his teacher and time at Chicago.<sup>12</sup> While at Chicago, Carl also studied history and aesthetics with Robert Morgan and Rose Subotnik. Carl received his doctorate in 1983 after completing *Ebb and Flow* for twelve instrumentalists and an analytic essay on *Sun-Treader*, by Carl Ruggles.

In 1980, while still at the University of Chicago, Carl received an individual artist grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Lurcy Fellowship to study at the Conservatoire Nationale Supérieure and the Sorbonne. He spent the year in Paris taking classes with Betsy Jolas and Iannis Xenakis. Carl considers his time with Xenakis as pivotal as his discovery of Ives. Whereas Ives's music provided Carl the permission to express

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<sup>10</sup> Email exchange with composer, 2018-02-08.

<sup>11</sup> Email exchange with composer, 2018-02-08.

<sup>12</sup> Kyle Gann, "The Symphonic Temperament," *PostClassic*, February 24, 2009.

himself in music, Xenakis provided a template on how to do so. Carl left Paris conceiving of musical form in completely new ways. Though Carl did not adopt the stochastic methods Xenakis used in his music, Carl learned to develop time-based structures that originated from pitch-based structures. In his music, this training has resulted in developing an overtone-based harmonic system that guides the overall form and structure of his works.

Carl joined the faculty at The Hartt School in 1984 as an Assistant Professor of Music Composition, working with a varied group of composers over the years that has included Lisa Coons, Elizabeth Brown, Stephen Gryc, Gilda Lyons, David Macbride, Tawnie Olson, James Sellars, Larry Alan Smith, and Ken Steen. While a junior faculty member, he worked with a Boston-based concert series called “Extension Works.” As artistic director, Carl helped produce programs highlighting the music of living composers. He continues to do so as artistic director of the “Foot in the Door” ensemble at Hartt.<sup>13</sup> It was during his early years at Hartt that Carl began writing reviews for *Fanfare Magazine*.<sup>14</sup> Carl has commented that writing for *Fanfare* allows him “to stay in touch with what was happening in the field.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Carl’s work as a critic has contributed much to understanding music of the latter twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>16</sup> It is likely that Robert Carl’s interactions with Meyer

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<sup>13</sup> Named after Alfred C. Fuller (1885-1973) of the Fuller Brush Company. Mr. Fuller was the Hartt School’s principal benefactor for many years. “A Foot in the Door” is the title of Fuller’s autobiography, and also the phrase he coined as a technique employed by his door-to-door salesmen. (Hartt School Website, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://harttweb.uha.edu>.)

<sup>14</sup> In 1994, Boston-based composer Scott Wheeler suggested Carl contact *Fanfare Magazine* about writing reviews.

<sup>15</sup> Email exchange with composer, 2018-02-11.

<sup>16</sup> His book *In C* broadened the discussion on the lasting effects of minimalism on musical culture. His articles for *Contemporary Music Review* and *College Music Symposium* have demonstrated connections between seemingly disparate musical practices. Similar and additional writings are noted in the literature review below.

and Morgan influenced his path toward examining music from a cultural and historical perspective. Directing ensembles and programs focused on new music has also kept Carl close to the development of trends and styles.

### *Literature Review*

Robert Carl's publications, including books, articles and music reviews, far outweigh the literature about him and his music. The oldest materials include album reviews by Molly Sheridan, specifically of Carl's CDs *Open*, and *From Japan*.<sup>17</sup> Carl's longtime friend and colleague Kyle Gann has regularly discussed Carl and his music on Gann's blog PostClassic.<sup>18</sup> Since 2008, Carl and his music have received more attention. Molly Sheridan interviewed him in 2013 and wrote an in-depth article for the website New Music Box.<sup>19</sup> In 2017, Carl was interviewed for Yale University's Oral History of American Music (OHAM) archive.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these few resources, I exchanged numerous emails with Carl and interviewed him twice in person in November 2016 and February 2018. Conducting these

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<sup>17</sup> Molly Sheridan, "Robert Carl: Music for Strings Adaskin String Trio and others (New World)," *TimeOut New York*, April 27, 2006.

Molly Sheridan, "Sounds Heard: Robert Carl—From Japan." *New Music Box*, August 21, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Entries include "The Symphonic Temperament," February 24, 2009; "What 2009 Sounds Like, Symphonically," March 1, 2009; "Those Jangling High C's on the Piano," July 2, 2009; "Confessions of a Closet Midtowner," July 26, 2009; "Maxing Out on Minimalism in Kansas," August 12, 2009; "The Minimalist Alliance," September 10, 2009; "The Objective View," February 10, 2010; "Success Is Just Another Form of Failure," July 17, 2010; "Safe Haven for Us Oddballs," October 14, 2010; "Upcoming Appearances," June 1, 2011; "Time-Keeper and Track Skipper," June 1, 2013; "Following Perfect Lives," August 18, 2013; "Symphonic Milestone," July 12, 2014; "Quixotic Application of Dots to Paper," November 9, 2014; "Part of a Targeted Audience for Once," December 14, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Molly Sheridan. "Robert Carl: The Time Keeper." *New Music Box*. June 1, 2013

<sup>20</sup> Neither the audio or transcript are available as of March 2018.



interviews was necessary to understand structural aspects of Carl's music, particularly harmonic and temporal aspects that only receive passing mention in program notes. These interviews will also remain a part of the literature on Carl. They are available to researchers looking to examine other aspects of his music. Like the OHAM archive, they add to the narrative of American musical developments in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Unlike the published materials about Carl, his aforementioned writings are a striking quantity of aesthetic and cultural observations on music. Reviewing books and recordings for *Fanfare Magazine* since 1994, Robert Carl has heard and written about an impressive number of recordings, mostly of twentieth and twenty-first century American and European composers.<sup>21</sup> His other writings include an analysis of Carl Ruggles's orchestral work *Sun-treader*;<sup>22</sup> a book *Terry Riley: In C*, which examines the lasting effects of Riley's work; four articles for the journals *Contemporary Music Review* and *College Music Symposium*, all of which demonstrate connections between seemingly disparate musical practices;<sup>23</sup> a series of

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Carl has written 1,059 reviews, articles, and interviews to date for the magazine on composers ranging from Hans Abrahamsen, John Luther Adams, and George Antheil to Iannis Xenakis, Pamela Z, and John Zorn. A complete listing of his writings for *Fanfare* is available online at [http://fanfarearchive.com/indices/itop/reviewers/h1\\_036.html](http://fanfarearchive.com/indices/itop/reviewers/h1_036.html).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Carl, "A fearful symmetry: micro/macro structure in Carl Ruggles's *Sun-treader*," *Sonus*. Cambridge, Mass. Vol. 15, no. 2 (1994/95). The article also served as Robert Carl's dissertation essay at the University of Chicago.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Carl, "The Politics of Definition in New Music," *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989).  
Robert Carl, "Six Case Studies in New American Music: A Postmodern Portrait Gallery," *College Music Symposium* 30 (1990).  
Robert Carl, "Three Points on the Spectrum: The Music of Louis Karchin, Lois V Vierk, and Paul Drescher," *Contemporary Music Review* 10(1) (1994).  
Robert Carl, Introduction, "Historicism in New American Music 1980-1995," *Contemporary Music Review* 20(4) (2001).

articles on compositional trends for the website *New Music Box*;<sup>24</sup> and a collection of essays titled *Survivable Music – The Emerging Common Practice*.<sup>25</sup> Carl also edited and helped publish Jonathan Kramer’s book, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Listening*.<sup>26</sup>

Most important to Carl’s role as composer are the many musical works he has written. These including ten orchestral works, thirty works for various large ensembles (including wind ensemble and conducted chamber works), thirty mixed chamber ensemble works (such as trios and quartets), nineteen solo instrumental works (or works with piano accompaniment), ten works for voice (some with instrumental ensembles), six choral works, and twenty-two electronic works (including fixed media pieces, electroacoustic music, and sound-art installations). Carl is a prolific composer and in the last decade alone he has written thirty-nine works for all the categories listed above.

#### *Historicism, Pluralism, and Temporality*

Among the many features of Carl’s music, topics such as historicism, pluralism, and temporality feature prominently in his works. All three shape the temporal and harmonic features of his music and merit explanation. These topics surface in different ways over the history of Western art music but are inexorably linked to musical postmodernism, a shift in

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Carl, “Eight Waves a Composer Will Ride in This Century,” *New Music Box*, June 1, 2013. Robert Carl, “Music After Life: Searching for Survival,” *New Music Box*, August 6, 2015. Robert Carl, “Music After Life: Posthumous Lessons,” *New Music Box*, August 13, 2015. Robert Carl, “Music After Life: Twists of Fate,” *New Music Box*, August 20, 2015. Robert Carl, “Music After Life: Guiding Lights,” *New Music Box*, August 27, 2015. Robert Carl, “Jonathan Kramer’s Gift,” *New Music Box*, August, 24, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> The collection includes his observations on trends within his own music and other music at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It remains unpublished as of March, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> The book was posthumously published based on a manuscript recovered by Kramer’s widow. The book also includes a section with essays by composers and theorists on how they were influenced by Kramer and his work.

musical thinking that began in the 1970s and 80s. It was a movement that extended modernism beyond its formalist trappings. Postmodern music, as defined by Jonathan Kramer, dismantled totalized forms, broke down barriers between styles, embraced discontinuity, and placed formal value within the listening experience.<sup>27</sup> George Rochberg's Third String Quartet, Alfred Schnittke's Concerto Grosso, William Bolcom's Third Symphony, and John Corigliano's *Ghosts of Versailles* are a handful of examples of works from this time period that merge disparate styles into a unified listening experience.

Though related to postmodernism, historicism in music has a broad background dating back to Johannes Brahms, Felix Mendelssohn, and arguably Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Musical historicism is the presence of historical themes, styles, and compositional techniques in contemporary music. The first noticeable presence of historicism in twentieth century music was the establishment of a Neoclassical style. Baroque and Classical era forms became the basis for a modern, refined music in opposition to Expressionism. Igor Stravinsky is famously associated with this style with such works as *Pulcinella*, *Dumbarton Oaks*, his Octet, and several symphonies written between 1920 and 1954. Stravinsky, Ravel, Hindemith, and many other composers during the inter-war period used older works and styles as the basis for new creative endeavors. While Neoclassicism maintained historicism as its primary focus, postmodernism relegated historical inclusion as one tool of expression among many.

An equally strong aspect of postmodernism, pluralism has a smaller historical presence. Pluralism embraces classical and vernacular music as interchangeable styles to be

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<sup>27</sup> A complete list of traits Kramer attributed to postmodern music can be found in Chapter 2 of this thesis. See also, Jonathan Kramer, "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time," *Indiana Theory Review*, Volume 17/2 (Fall 1996), pp. 21-61.

used for an essential musical goal; the musical essence of a work is more important than how it is expressed. Alternatively, multiple forms of expression become part of an essential goal. This treatment of styles applies to all forms of classical and vernacular music, whether modern popular song or indigenous folk music. Prior to 1850, Western art music remained separate from vernacular music with few exceptions. These realms slowly intersected, first with the emergence of musical nationalism and exoticism in the nineteenth century. All these intersections maintained a hierarchy between classical and vernacular music, with the exception of Third Stream synthesis suggested by Gunther Schuller. Postmodernism embraced a completely egalitarian mix of styles. The inclusion of particular styles also became a tool of expression on the postmodern palate.

The broadest of all these topics, temporality can be understood as both the experience and structure of music. Scholarship from the 1980s to present has shown how music can be intuitively understood on multiple layers. Jonathan Kramer's book, *The Time in Music*, explored a variety of temporal processes that he categorized according to absolute and experiential reference points.<sup>28</sup> These processes can be found in music from the Common Practice to today. Many styles of the latter twentieth century, including modernism, postmodernism, minimalism, and postminimalism, have crafted techniques that favor experiential processes over absolute. The postmodern embrace of discontinuity and modernist concepts of form affect how Carl's music is heard.

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<sup>28</sup> Kramer uses many categories to describe the variety of reference points to temporal processes. The most discussed include absolute time, chronometric time, clock time, continuous time (continuity), directed (or goal-directed) time, discontinuous time, gestural time, linear time, moment time, multiply-directed time, musical time, non-directed time, non-linear time, objective, personal (or subjective), real, subjective, and vertical.

This thesis will examine Carl's music from the 1980s to the present, noting the presence of historicism, pluralism, and temporality in many of his pieces. While not every piece exhibits the same focus, these concerns appear to some degree throughout his output and contribute to an experiential unity.<sup>29</sup> The historical leanings of Carl's early works are present in the subject, content, and style of these works. Chamber works such as *Time's Spring*, *Time's Filter*, and *Time/Memory/Shadow* suggest a programmatic imperative to explore history and time as a facet of music. Following the background presented in this chapter, chapter 2 discusses how Carl arrived at a focus on concrete historicism and abstractions of time (specifically non-linear sequencing) within these works. The chapter concludes with in-depth analyses of *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen* and *Swing Shift*, two works that demonstrate this focus. Later in his career, Carl shifted from strictly temporal concerns to spatial and harmonic structures. By 2005, he had developed a harmonic system that has guided many of his works since. Chapter 3 examines the process by which he arrived at this system and how it is executed in his music. The chapter concludes with an in-depth analysis of *River's Bend*, a work that demonstrates his harmonic system at work. If Robert Carl's music represents a facet of the myriad trends within late twentieth and early twenty-first century American art music, there is no better way to understand these trends than by diving into his methods and how they play out in the music.

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<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Kramer defines experiential unity as the difference: "between the alleged unity of a composition (whether studied in score or in performance) and that of music as heard, understood, and remembered. I call the former *textual unity*, and the latter *experiential unity*." (Jonathan Kramer, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Listening*, ed. Robert Carl (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 101.)

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICISM AND TIME

In the 1980s, Robert Carl literally deconstructed the chorale “Die Nacht ist Kommen,” turning it into his piano work *Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen*. Intended as a companion piece to the chorale, *Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen* juxtaposes historical styles and melodies. In his piece, Carl throws segments of the original chorale out of order and presents harmonies unheard of in the seventeenth century. Johann Sebastian Bach comes to life through the lens of Igor Stravinsky and John Cage (via Robert Carl). The result is a new work dealing with concrete historicism and time as an abstract phenomenon that goes beyond mere quotation.

*Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen* uses historical music as the source of its creative expression, and many of Carl’s works similarly deal with concrete historicism and time as an abstract phenomenon. These two topics intersect with traits of postmodernism as identified by Jonathan Kramer. In his article “Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time,” Kramer discussed fourteen traits shared by postmodern music, that it:

- 1) is not simply a repudiation of modernism or its continuation, but has aspects of both;
- 2) is, on some level and in some way, ironic;
- 3) does not respect boundaries between sonorities and procedures of the past and of the present;
- 4) seeks to break down barriers between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” styles;
- 5) shows disdain for the often unquestioned value of structural unity;
- 6) refuses to accept the distinction between elitist and populist values;
- 7) avoids totalizing forms (e.g., does not allow an entire piece to be tonal or serial or cast in a prescribed formal mold);

- 8) includes quotations of or references to music of many traditions and cultures;
- 9) embraces contradictions;
- 10) distrusts binary oppositions;
- 11) includes fragmentations and discontinuities;
- 12) encompasses pluralism and eclecticism;
- 13) presents multiple meanings and multiple temporalities; and
- 14) locates meaning and even structure in listeners, more than in scores, performances, or composers.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these traits relate to an avoidance of musical boundaries (often ironic); broad reliance on historical music, styles, and musical forms; and discontinuous or dis-unified structures that are open to interpretation by the listener. Specific traits, such as historicism and temporal concerns, feature strongly in Carl's music. However, even though his music displays postmodern tendencies, he does not identify explicitly as a postmodernist composer. Additionally, harmonic concerns have surpassed these postmodern traits as dominant features of Carl's later works.<sup>2</sup>

Carl's earlier works wove together historical melodies and styles. These pieces linked the past with the present and created unified works from disparate sources. As Carl developed his own voice, his postmodernist tendencies evolved, but he did not abandon them. The concern for linking an external past with the present shifted to an exploration of the internal past and present of individual pieces. His works explored abstractions of time within this music, appearing as non-linear connections. Carl has commented that "postmodernism has come and gone, but we are still living with the consequences."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Kramer, "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time," *Indiana Theory Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Fall 1996): 21-61.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Personal correspondence with composer.

ironic and progressive impulse to create a collage of older and newer music is no longer a driving force; however, temporal and stylistic pastiche is still a valid tool for creative expression. For Carl, this has meant reshaping historicism into an open pluralism concerned mostly with abstract time.

From the beginning of his career, Robert Carl engaged with postmodernism. His generation was learning compositional craft when Luciano Berio was writing *Sinfonia* and Alfred Schnittke his *Concerto Grosso*. Carl's teachers were understanding, implementing, and discussing style as philosophy. He jokingly summed up lessons with George Rochberg as "considering the fate of the world—what the flute does here, what does that mean in terms of Western civilization."<sup>4</sup> Leonard Meyer's seminars at Pennsylvania highlighted topics of style and musical expectations (later turned into his book *Style and Music*). Ralph Shapey elicited Romantic ideals through a fiercely modernist (and individual) style. Engaging with the past, present, and future of style was important to Robert Carl's mentors and colleagues. It is reasonable that this musical *ethos* would imprint on him.

Carl has even remarked in his writings that the propensity for Americans to engage with historical music can be tied to a lesser "burden of the past"<sup>5</sup> as compared to European colleagues, positing that American composers are doing so regardless of stylistic background because it is a fertile source for creation and commentary. Cognizant of this phenomenon in his writings on the music of others, he has since incorporated this trend into essays on openness common to all twenty-first century composers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Molly Sheridan, "Robert Carl: The Time-Keeper," *New Music Box*, June 1, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Carl, Introduction, *Contemporary Music Review*, 20(4) (2001).

<sup>6</sup> See "Eight Waves a Composer Will Ride This Century" (*New Music Box*, June 1, 2013) and *Survivable Music* (unpublished essay collection).



This broad spectrum from concrete historicism to abstract time is present in the music of his influences, giving further license to incorporate these concepts into his personal style. Charles Ives, George Rochberg, and Iannis Xenakis are the most notable among Carl's influences who engaged with history and time. Ives appropriated materials to create new music by freely layering American vernacular quotes and styles. Most famous for his Third String Quartet, Rochberg developed a style concerned with the interplay of other styles, mostly historical. This interplay within works by both composers created new commentary and narratives using appropriated materials. Xenakis used forms analogous to geometric structures in rotation—an abstraction that led Carl to reconsider time within form and a “connection... between time and space,” specifically how pieces unfold over time.<sup>7</sup>

Carl's music from the 1980s into the '90s features the most overt examples of concrete historicism. These references appear as styles, themes, or melodies that are juxtaposed with modernist-sounding music. These works vary in their Ivesian or Rochbergian treatments of historical material, but the appropriation of the past is perceptible. Because each work varies in its techniques, it is helpful to examine some individually to see what aspects of postmodernism are present. The following is a sampling of his many works from the 1980s and '90s that strongly exhibit postmodern traits, specifically works that do not distinguish between populist and elitist styles, music with discontinuous (or non-totalized) forms, and pieces that reference both modernist traditions and music of the past.

Carl wrote his Piano Sonata, No. 1, “*Spiral Dances*” in 1984. It is his earliest work professionally recorded. Set in three titled movements that are paced slow-fast-slow, the

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<sup>7</sup> Molly Sheridan, “Robert Carl: The Time Keeper,” *New Music Box*, June 1, 2013. This abstraction would also become important in the evolution of his harmonic approach detailed in Chapter 3.

overall emphasis of the work is on spacious *tempi*. “A kind of phantom waltz”<sup>8</sup> unifies the three movements, appearing obscured in the first two movements and becoming the climactic focus of the third movement. In addition to the ghostly waltz, insistent note repetitions and cyclic motives permeate all three movements. These repetitions shift character to suit each section and act as memories foreshadowing a quiet, ghostly end. The waltz is not quoted from a historical source, but it does reference a past style. It gradually appears in larger, more recognizable segments, adhering to the cumulative form J. Peter Burkholder and other scholars have attributed to Ives’s music.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the reappearing waltz suggests a dialogue between past and present. Older and newer musical styles are unified within the piece.

In 1988, Carl composed *Nell Miller, Op. 1*, a fixed media work he calls an “audio-dream-documentary.”<sup>10</sup> Created with a Synclavier, the work manipulates an oral history Carl conducted with his maternal grandmother into a collage of spoken audio and vernacular music. Angular and modernist-sounding music drifts in and out as well. The manipulated interview is fragmented and jumps in a non-linear fashion between portions of the initial conversation. The distorted quality of the original recording is reinforced by similar manipulations applied to the wafting musical fragments. Though the music serves to underscore the text, it also serves as a pluralistic unification of Carl’s musical and familial heritage. Here he uses a Rochbergian approach to generate narrative through disparate styles.

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<sup>8</sup> Kyle Gann, Liner Notes to *Piano Works of Robert Carl* (Centaur Records), 3.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Personal correspondence with author. November 5, 2016.

Carl wrote *Time/Memory/Shadow* in 1988 with the specific intention of exploring abstract time. It exploits time and memory within a conceptual, cumulative form. Carl explains the piece as “a play of histories”<sup>11</sup>—musical, historical, and internal. It unfolds over the fifteen-minute work in two separate trios—piano trio plus violin, viola, and harp. Each trio is separated by a degree of texture and harmony. The piano trio remains dissonant throughout most of the piece and features a variety of non-traditional timbres—scratch tones, playing inside the piano, etc.—while the second trio features near-consonant lyricism. Both trios are layered in a manner reminiscent of Elliot Carter’s chamber works, relegating separate harmonies and textures to instrumental subsets. Both trios unfold with motives derived (and distorted) from a traditional, tonal march Carl wrote in his youth. The piece builds to frenetic levels of rhythmic activity that climax in a sonic exuviation, out of which the march appears. The march appears in full, played by the complete sextet, almost as an afterthought to the climax, relating back to ghostly fragments of the march found in earlier sections. Carl describes the piece as “a mystery, a series of clues pointing toward a brief march I wrote early in my life as a composer. It makes a spectral appearance near the end of the piece... Always present in the music in some form, it becomes the object of a very free flow of play throughout.”<sup>12</sup> The use of cumulative form in this work is similar to its use in his Piano Sonata No. 1 in regard to materials foreshadowing music that remains hidden until the end. *Time/Memory/Shadow* obscures the source to an extent that connections between motive and phrase are only faintly apparent. This conceptual form unfolds in multiple scales of time, and the space present between each ghostly fragment gives the listener time to reflect on how

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Carl, Liner Notes to *New Music Series, Volume 3* (Neuma Compact Discs).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Carl, Liner Notes to *New Music Series, Volume 3* (Neuma Compact Discs).

to approach the eerily familiar music. The unification of disparate musical styles and adherence to a non-linear structure both align with Kramer's list of postmodern traits.

In 1988, Carl also wrote *Swing Shift*, a short work for piano in a strong (though likely unintended) postminimal aesthetic.<sup>13</sup> A repeated, single-note pulse drives the piece, over which melodies and chords of varying phrase lengths enter and disappear. Jazz and Latin influenced motives repeat with constant variation. This constant variation “aims for maximum surprise in subverting the listener's rhythm and the expectation of repetitions,”<sup>14</sup> yet it unifies the many disparate styles that appear throughout. The manner in which styles are appropriated approaches a Rochbergian dialogue. The second half of this chapter features a full analysis of the work.

One of Carl's last pieces of the 1980s is the deconstruction of the hymn “*Die Nacht ist Kommen*” (mentioned at the chapter's outset). *Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen* is a literal dismemberment of J.S. Bach's harmonization of Chorale No. 231. Intended as a companion piece to the chorale, Carl's work sounds like a distant memory of the same material. It is truly a commentary on historical content. However, the music is appropriated to create a spacious work that has both Ivesian and Rochbergian qualities. This work is also analyzed in the second half of this chapter.

One of Carl's larger chamber works is *Lesgedowndaheah*, written in 1996 for a “raucous ensemble [eleven players/funk band].”<sup>15</sup> The two movement work employs subsets

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<sup>13</sup> Carl's aesthetic and pedagogical influences results in music that shares similarities with other postminimalist composers, though he does not identify his music as such.

<sup>14</sup> Kyle Gann, Liner Notes to *Piano Works of Robert Carl* (Centaur Records), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Carl describes the ensemble as such in his catalog. The full instrumentation is trumpet, 2 alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, trombone, 2 electric guitars, bass guitar, 2 percussionists, and piano. (Robert Carl's Website.)

of the ensemble to juxtapose popular rock styles with modernist idioms. Non-descript grooves and fast guitar passages characterize the rock sections. Angular melodies and dissonant harmonies permeate the modernist sections. Each stylistic portion of the piece dovetails with the next, but there is no complete layering of styles. Intended as a commentary on mid-1990s American politics, the collage is fragmented and serves to drive a narrative about a fragmented society along with Carl's view of contemporary politics. Again, Carl achieves unity through weaving together disparate styles in a manner similar to Rochberg and Kramer's list of postmodern characteristics.

The remainder of Robert Carl's music in the '90s features fewer Rochbergian dialogues and more abstract exploration of time. However, it is still possible to find stylistic appropriation in later works. Carl did not abandon postmodernism, but the imprint it left in his music evolved from concrete to abstract concerns. Discovering group theory in the Sobornne class with Xenakis was a revelation "that blew my vistas open."<sup>16</sup> It solidified the ways in which Carl would use time to reveal structures within a piece, considering works as analogous to sculptures revealing features and facets through rotation. Focusing more on this abstraction, later pieces are less attached to historical content or style.

#### *Analysis of Nact(t[raum]) ist Kommen*

*Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen* is an ideal work to examine how Robert Carl juxtaposed historical styles and melodies to create new works that went beyond mere quotation. Written in 1983, this brief piano work is a companion to Johann Sebastian Bach's harmonization of the Lutheran chorale "Die Nacht ist Kommen," BWV 231. Carl states in his written program

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<sup>16</sup> Molly Sheridan, "Robert Carl: The Time-Keeper," *New Music Box*, June 1, 2013.

note that he was drawn to this chorale “for the evocative poetry of its title,” and “its tonal ambiguity.”<sup>17</sup> The chorale’s title translates as “the night is coming.” The nature of Carl’s postmodern realization of the chorale is immediately evident in his title, a reconstruction of the original title that suggests motion and imagery with the German words *nach* (toward), *nacht* (night), *traum* (dream), and *raum* (room). This word collage reflects the pastiche of style and content in the music.<sup>18</sup>

“Die Nacht ist Kommen” serves as musical content which Carl re-mixed to generate his work. Every line of the four-part chorale is present in the new work. Although there are melodic similarities between both works, the nature of the mash-up is more motivic. These motives hint at the original chorale but do not sound or appear as direct quotation. Carl’s music is building on top of the historical companion and does not merely reference it.

Carl emphasizes the nature of NTK as a companion piece to DNK by moving between several distinct musical styles throughout the work. Motives from DNK maintain the same feeling of a Lutheran chorale when presented, though new harmonies give them the feeling of a Stravinskian, Neoclassical approach. Intermittent interludes provide atonal and improvisatory breaks between chorale phrases akin to John Cage. Table 2.1 shows the order in which these styles appear in the music, mostly as a series of alternating chorale-like phrases and aleatoric interludes.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Carl, Program note, *Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen*, New York: American Composer Editions, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> To avoid confusion, the remainder of this analysis will refer to the original chorale as DNK (*Die Nacht ist Kommen*) and Robert Carl’s work as NTK (*Nac(t[raum]) ist Kommen*).

TABLE 2.1. Styles and sections by measure number in *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen*

Section	Measures	Style/character
Intro	1-6	2 measure, homophonic phrases
Phrase 1	6-8	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 1	8	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 2	8-10	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 2	10	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 3	10-12	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 3	12	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 4	13-14	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 4	14	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 5	14-16	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 5	16	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 6	16-18	Bach-like chorale
Interlude 6	18	Improvisatory, atonal
Phrase 7	18-20	Bach-like chorale
Coda	unmeasured	Improvisatory

DNK is a fairly straightforward chorale with seven phrases, though the harmonization and its seven cadences are intriguing. The chorale begins and ends with a definite G-major cadence; however, until the penultimate phrase it appears the chorale could be in G-minor. This modal mixture creates a tonal ambiguity that appealed to Carl. Figure 2.1 shows Bach's harmonization and how it generates this modal mixture. Phrases that suggest the tonal center is G-minor are underlined.

The image shows a musical score for 'Die Nacht ist Kommen' in 4/4 time. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 7, and the second system contains measures 8 through 14. Below the notes, Roman numeral chord symbols are provided for each measure. Some symbols are underlined to indicate specific harmonic groupings.

Measure 1: I

Measure 2: V<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup>/IV IV<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup>

Measure 3: I

Measure 4: II v

Measure 5: V<sup>6</sup>/ii ii<sup>6</sup> iii<sup>6</sup> V/ii

Measure 6: ii

Measure 7: ii IV<sup>6</sup> IV v<sup>6</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> v

Measure 8: I

Measure 9: I V<sup>6</sup> I V/F<sup>2</sup>

Measure 10: F<sup>2</sup>

Measure 11: IV<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup> I

Measure 12: IV<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup>/V V

Measure 13: I<sup>6</sup> IV<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup> V

Measure 14: Cad<sup>ti</sup> I

FIGURE 2.1. Harmonic analysis of *Die Nacht ist Kommen*

NTK features three general sections (see table 2.1): an introduction, seven phrases with interludes, and a coda. All three sections feature musical material from DNK; however, the middle seven phrases present music from the chorale most directly. Each of the three sections presents one or more distinct styles. The introduction is most similar to a homophonic Lutheran chorale, the seven phrases sound like a Neoclassical interpretation of Bach’s four-part chorales, the interludes suggest John Cage with atonal improvisation, and the coda continues an improvisatory style with more structured harmonies. The shift in style from strict homophonic chorale to pitch-driven improvisation suggests that NTK is a continuation of Bach’s work and not merely commentary.

The introduction establishes a precedence for re-mixing materials from DNK throughout all of NTK. Measures 1 through 6 feature cadential chords from the seven phrases of DNK out of order. Although these chords are not presented in their original order, they are presented rhythmically as three, two-bar phrases to maintain the feel of a homophonic Lutheran chorale. Figure 2.2 shows the opening measures and labels from which phrase of the original chorale each chord is drawn. The first phrase features cadential chords from



phrase seven, six, five, and four, ending on a G-major triad. Though the phrase cadences on a G-major triad and suggests a tonal center of G, it is unsteady and quickly dissolves by measure 6. The second phase features cadential chords from phrase one, two, and three, ending on a D-minor triad. The third phase features cadential chords from phrase two, three, two, and altered three, ending on an ambiguous D-minor triad over an octave G.

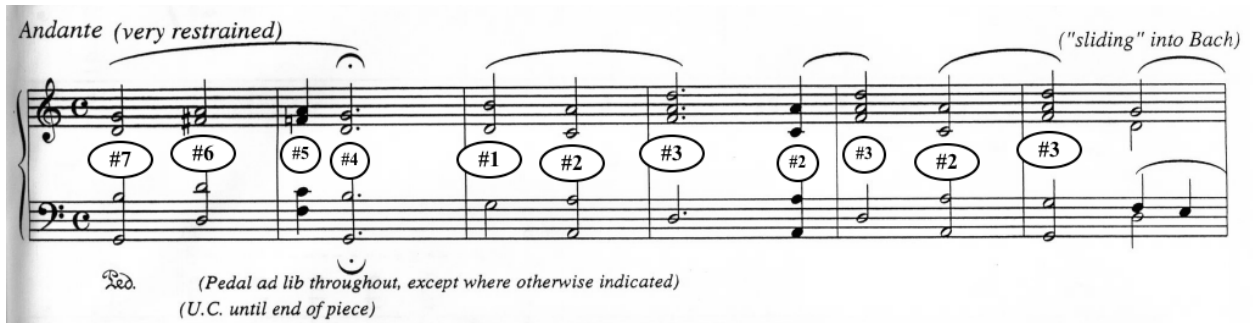


FIGURE 2.2. Cadential chords from *Nacht ist Kommen* present in measures 1-6, reprinted by permission of American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI), Publisher

The seven phrases and interludes that comprise the composition’s main body follow a re-mixing approach Carl documented in his program notes:

My technique involves a simple conceit – the seven phrases of the original [DNK] appear in their entirety in this trope, the right- and left-hand parts of each are always taken from two different source phrases... Beyond this level of the piece, periodic interruptions occur, made up of material comprised of all other pitch-classes not used in the immediately precedent phrase...<sup>19</sup>

Carl’s “simple conceit” is documented in table 2.2, where the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass line of each phrase of NTK corresponds to soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines from two phrases from DNK. The right-hand material consists of the soprano and alto line of one phrase of DNK while the left hand consists of the tenor and bass line of an unrelated phrase.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Carl, Program note, *Nach[t(raum)] ist Kommen*, New York: American Composer Editions, 1983.

In two instances, the soprano and alto or tenor and bass lines are inverted (see table 2.2) While the right-hand of the first and last phrase of NTK corresponds to the first and last phrase of DNK, there are no other numerical relationships between NTK and DNK phrases or even between right-hand and left-hand phrases in NTK. The mismatch between upper and lower voices obfuscates the original material (even further when voices are inverted).

TABLE 2.2. Choral lines (by phrase) from *Die Nacht ist Kommen* in phrases of *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen*

Phrase	Soprano Line	Alto Line	Tenor Line	Bass Line
1	1S	1A	2T*	2B*
2	2S	2A	6B*	NEW MUSIC
3	5S	5A	7T*	TB
4	3A*	3S*	1B*	1T*
5	4S	4A	3T	3B
6	6S	6A	5T	5B
7	7S	7A	4T*	4B*

Each line of each phrase in DNK features a strong, four-beat pulse decorated with non-chord tones. The strong, four-beat pulse remains in NTK after rearranging the phrases, and the music reminds listeners of a four-part chorale by J.S. Bach. The resultant harmony from rearranging source material, however, is not reminiscent of Bach and sounds more akin to Neoclassical works of the early twentieth century. DNK is tonal and features chords that are never harmonically far from G-major (or G-minor). Stacking the top and bottom of different chords from DNK results in two dyads that imply different roots. In many cases, one dyad could be interpreted as an extension of the other implied root or an added “wrong” note. For example, the first chord of measure 7 of NTK features pitch-classes C and E below

pitch-classes D and A. This could be heard as simultaneously implied C-major and D-major triads or as an inverted A-minor triad with an added fourth.

The interludes between each main phrase of NTK are aleatoric. Each interlude features pitches notated without rhythm and inside parentheses. The performance note below the first interlude reads “Play material in parentheses very freely; like an afterthought or voice barely heard from a distance.”<sup>20</sup> Each interlude features pitch-classes not present in the preceding cadence, giving an atonal feel to the music. Many of the interludes feature augmented intervals, adding to their atonal sound.

The main section of NTK ends on an inconclusive yet chorale-like cadence before beginning the coda. Measure 20 features a G-major triad that concludes the seventh phrase (according to Robert Carl’s procedure) followed by an A-minor triad. Both chords have fermatas, suggesting the A-minor triad is the ultimate cadence. This implied bitonality extends into the coda.

Like the interludes, the coda features pitches notated without rhythm or meter. The coda is in two sections: six polychord arpeggios followed by a wafting conclusion that drifts toward a final cadence. The six arpeggios use DNK cadences in a manner reminiscent of the intro and main phrases. The first arpeggio begins with the triad from cadence two followed by the triad of cadence one. The second arpeggio features triads from cadence three and two. This pattern repeats to include the triads of all cadences as shown in Figure 2.3. The second portion of the coda features a minor ninth, an augmented octave, and a diminished octave moving in a circle of fourths (also shown in Figure 2.3) that end on a G-D dyad spanning the full piano register, a faintly heard yet conclusive final cadence.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Carl, *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen*, New York: American Composer Editions, 1983.

FIGURE 2.3. Series of cadential chords and circle of fifths in coda of *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen*, reprinted by permission of American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI), Publisher

The processes involved in reconstructing materials from DNK into NTK are direct enough to be reduced to an ordering of pitch collections (linear and vertical). Analyzing these processes demonstrates how Carl connected the musical past and present. By reassembling each phrase of DNK, he discreetly quotes historic music. The placement and ordering of these phrases makes some quotes more apparent than others. The structure of NTK also unifies three styles in a disjointed presentation of the original chorale, allowing the listener to consider narratives connecting DNK to NTK. The direct quote(s) and non-linear presentation of source material in this piece demonstrate Carl's interest in his historicism and discontinuity.

#### *Analysis of Swing Shift*

*Swing Shift* is another of Robert Carl's early piano works with significant stylistic juxtapositions, though in this work the mixture of styles is most prominent and there are no direct musical quotations. Written in 1987 as a competition piece for the 1988 Renée B.

Fischer piano competition (senior division, grades 9-12), the work is a pluralistic mix of contemporary concert music styles and vernacular styles. Again, Carl gives some indication of the piece's character through a title with multiple meanings. While the term "swing shift" references a period of work from late afternoon to midnight, 'swing' also references the use of jazz idioms in the piece, and 'shift' references a constant pulse that moves and develops over the course of the work.

Although there are no direct musical quotations as with *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen*, *Swing Shift* uses harmonic progressions and forms reminiscent of New Orleans jazz and similar vernacular styles. These idiomatic structures are a type of generalized content that Carl incorporates into *Swing Shift*. The work features a blues progression on a micro- and macro-layer. Carl notes that an explicit blues progression appears partway through the work, "while its larger harmonic movements are [also] determined by the proportions of the classic 12-bar blues."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to an explicit blues progression, other harmonies and rhythmic figures reminiscent of jazz surface throughout the work. Dominant seventh chords, syncopated melodies, and modal scales suggest mainstream jazz, swing, Latin styles, and other jazz sub-genres. Between these jazz-influenced sections are thorny and angular passages with a modernist sound to their interval and pitch driven content. All these passages are woven together with a driving pulse that rapidly changes shape and character. Each shift in the pulse sets up new processes that surface and unwind for brief moments, never fully working themselves out. These short blocks of process-driven pulse align with qualities Kyle Gann

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Carl, Program Note, *Swing Shift*, New York: American Composer Editions, 1987.

and other scholars attribute to postminimalism.<sup>22</sup> As rapid as these changes are, the pulse establishes a constant background for the jazz-influenced figures and modernist-sounding passages. By layering multiple jazz sub-genres and modernist styles over a tenacious postminimalist pulse, a postmodern collage emerges. The pastiche develops continuity among disparate sounds and styles.

Carl highlights the stylistic shifts with character descriptions in the music and in his program notes. Carl writes, “the music begins stylistically ‘neutral’ (i.e. in a more ‘abstract,’ modern/minimal style) and only gradually brings in references to other more popular American musical traditions.”<sup>23</sup> The character descriptions separate *Swing Shift* into ten sections as shown in table 2.3. The descriptions at the beginning of the piece are abstract, yet emotional, such as “Sharp, crisp, clock-like,” at measure 1 and “Suddenly soft, mysterious,” at measure 9. As the piece progresses, the descriptions become more evocative of the musical traditions Carl is quoting, such as “Softly swinging; bluesy,” at measure 48. Nearly all sections are eight measures long and introduce new musical features that transition from the abstract to direct styles Carl references. The eighth section can be separated into three sub-sections so that the total number of sections and sub-sections total the number of measures in a 12-bar blues.

The tempo remains constant through all but one section. This continuity establishes a nearly-unbroken pulse. The only change in tempo corresponds to a temporary dissolution of the pulse which returns immediately in the next section at the original tempo. Though continuous, the pulse shifts durations, registers, and articulations between each section in an

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<sup>22</sup> See Kyle Gann, “Minimal Music, Maximal Impact,” *New Music Box*, November 1, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Carl, Program note, *Swing Shift*, New York: American Composer Editions, 1987.

arch-like form centered on section 6. The constant four-beat, quarter-note pulse that opens the piece returns at the end.

TABLE 2.3. Sections of *Swing Shift*, by measure number, including tempo, pitch center, and character description

Section	Measures	Tempo	Pitch Center	Description
1	1-8	80	A	Sharp, crisp, clock-like
2	9-16	80	A	Suddenly soft, mysterious
3	17-21	80	A	Bright, bounding!
4	22-29	80	A	Suddenly distance, menacing
5	30-34*	80	D	Thunderous, Jazzy!
6	35-42	160	D	Pull back slightly, then build up to m. 43
7	43-47*	80	D	Tempo I
8a	48-51	80	E	With a Latin feel
8b	52-55	80	E	
8c	56-58	80	E	
9	59-65	80	A-D-E	Softly swinging; bluesy
10	66-73	80	A	Stark, crisp, relentless; no pedal

The first section approximates its “clock-like” description with a constant quarter-note pulse on the pitch A below middle C played with a staccato articulation. This pulse sustains for all but the last measure, pausing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat of measure 8 as a premonition of the further shifts and unsteady alterations of the pulse to come. The pulse is accompanied by rapid, off-beat, sixteenth-note interjections. These interjections begin as octave As on A5 and A6 (scientific notation). The higher A is slowly replaced with C, B-flat, E-flat, and F, introducing new intervals that gradually destabilize the opening octaves. The rapid interjections maintain their off-beat positions while additional sixteenth- and eighth-notes are added to the beginning and end of these figures, reducing (though not removing) the pulse’s presence.

The second section earns its “mysterious” description by a sudden shift to quiet dynamics. The pulse now has tenuto articulations and off-beat interjections occur on pitches above and below the repeating A. The pulse destabilizes ever so slightly with dotted-eighth-to sixteenth-note substitutions on two weak beats, two unexpected accents, and a meter change in measure 16 that reduces the pulse to three beats. The introduction of new intervals continues where the previous section left off. By measure 14, nearly all pitch classes are present above and below the pulse. Despite the increasing chromaticism and slight interruptions to the pulse, the repeating A creates a sense of a stable pitch center.

The third section introduces syncopated, diatonic material in contrast to the previous intervallic oriented sections. The repeating A continues in combination with parallel thirds and sixths above that establish a temporary A-minor tonality. Short phrases end on dyads that are either part of an A-minor triad or part of a triad leading to A-minor. Despite the minor tonality, the description “bounding!” is apparent with off-beat accents and syncopated chords. The pulse begins with a stable four-beat pulse but further destabilizes with mid-measure triplets, unexpected accents, and shortened meters every four measures (notated as measure 20 and 21 because of repeat signs). Louder dynamics in this section and mid-measure crescendos emphasize the bright nature of this section as well.

The following section settles back into a constant four-beat pulse, but hides the pulse within an unsteady rhythmic pattern that presents a gradual mixture of abstract and vernacular styles. Quiet and separated sixteenth-notes in the low register of the piano emphasize the “distant” character of section four. The lower line, which previously carried the pulse with four even beats, now displaces the second and fourth beats in a manner that approximates syncopated, ragtime rhythms. The upper line includes either all four beats of



the quarter-note pulse or at least the second and fourth beats as part of its sixteen-note flourishes. Unison triplet rhythms and shortened measures at the end of each half of this section further destabilize the pulse hidden between the lines. The pulse continues on a repeated A, maintaining a tonal center until measure 29. Four ascending sixteenth notes function as leading tones into a new section with a new tonal center.

Section five clearly establishes D as its tonal center with octave Ds repeating in the lower register. This section in the work features the first shift in tonal center from A to D, paralleling the shift from tonic to pre-dominant in a blues progression if considering each section of Swing Shift as a measure of a 12-bar blues. This section switches back into a jazz-influenced character as indicated by its “Jazzy!” description. The right hand features parallel thirds and sixths that reinforce a D-major tonality. They are in a near-constant triplet pattern that approximates “swinging” eighth notes. However, the regularity of the pulse and swinging eighth notes, however, is constantly disrupted by irregular meters. The section alternates between measures in  $3\frac{1}{2}/4$  meter and  $2/4$  meter. Every measure sounds as though it is cut short of a regular pulse, including the final measure that features four sixteenth-notes leading into a tempo change. Although unsteady, loud dynamics emphasize the “Thunderous” nature of this section.

Section six confirms the disruption of pulse that slowly developed over the previous sections. It features meters and rhythms that quicken with each measure. The tempo for this section is twice as fast as well, making the changing meters and rhythms even more unstable. Each measure of this section features a series of chromatically expanding or diminishing intervals of equal duration. These patterns still center mostly on the pitch D, maintaining a tenuous sense of D as the tonal center. The duration of each note decreases measure by

measure in two sequences – measures 35-38 and measures 39-42. Nearly all measures include four beats, and the meter for each measure changes to accommodate four shorter beats. The rapid change of meter and note durations completely disrupts the pulse—for the first time, there is a complete lack of pulse. This disappearance and the appearance of interval-driven music gives this section a strict modernist feel with no jazz influences.

FIGURE 2.4 Metric and durational changes in measures 35-42 of *Swing Shift*, reprinted by permission of American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI), Publisher

The following section returns to the original tempo with an unusual syncopation that sounds like off-kilter blues. It reestablishes a pulse, though the pulse remains implicit as part of an ostinato that carries through the section. The ostinato features syncopated sixteenth-notes that give section seven a blues-driven sound. The section is in 15/16 with shortened meters every four measures (notated as measures 46 and 47 because of repeat signs). Each measure of 15/16 is notated in a lilting group of three quarter-note beats and one dotted-

eighth-note beat. This uneven beat grouping detracts from the strongly syncopated ostinato, giving a slight hiccup to the bluesy motive.

Section eight continues with three smaller sub-sections. It begins in a Latin-influenced style, briefly transitions into an angular and thorny passage, and ends with more of the Latin-influenced style. This is the first time two consecutive sections prominently feature jazz-influenced music. As was suggested in the program notes, American musical styles become more prominent as you progress through the piece. The first subsection features two measures of sixteenth-notes and syncopated eighth-notes characteristic of Latin music. It dissolves into shorter measures that maintain similar rhythmic groupings. These highly rhythmic passages are interrupted in measure 52. This subsection returns to the expanding intervals from section six. The Latin style reasserts itself in the final subsection at measure 56. This section clearly establishes E as the tonal center, particularly in Latin subsections that suggest an E-major tonality. This movement to the dominant of A matches the overall blues progression mapped onto the sections of this piece.

Section nine continues this jazz-influenced sound and features the most direct quote of the blues in *Swing Shift*. The section is only seven measures long and though the overall harmonic progression of the piece approximates a 12-bar blues progression, this section approximates an 8-bar blues progression as shown in Figure 2.4. Just as there are shortened measures throughout the piece that destabilize the pulse, the eighth measure of a standard blues progression is missing, destabilizing the quotation and keeping momentum into the next section. The section features a one-measure syncopated pattern that repeats on measures 59 through 62. A variation of the pattern continues at measure 63 and the original pattern returns at measure 65 as the progression returns to tonic. Although this section is a stylistic

quote, chromatically decreasing intervals in measures 63 and 64 hint at the modernist style present earlier in the piece. The section rapidly shifts tonal center to match the blues style, but establishes A as its primary tonal center which fits into the overall harmonic progression of the piece.

(Softly swinging, bluesy) 5.

sub p mp

Bar 1: A at

60 Bar 2: A Bar 3: D

Bar 4: A Bar 5: E

63 Bar 6: D Bar 7: A (Bar 8 missing)

65

FIGURE 2.4. 8-bar blues progression at measure 59 of *Swing Shift*, reprinted by permission of American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI), Publisher

The final section returns to the piece's sparse, opening texture. It features a constant four-beat pulse on the A below middle C, played with a tenuto articulation. There are small sixteenth-note interruptions above and below the pulse consisting mostly of octave As and an

occasional E-flat, E-natural, F-sharp, A-flat, and B-flat. The constant pulse of single pitches develops into a multi-pitch pulse at measure 70, progressing from an open fourth on A and D to the tetrachord A, B, D, and E. This final chord is a compressed quartal/quintal chord that approximates the dominant of the tonic A, which is also voiced as a compressed quartal/quintal tetrachord in the final measure as G-flat, A, D, and E. The final section returns to an even eight measures in a meter of 4/4, returning to the stable opening of *Swing Shift*.

*Swing Shift* begins and ends with a constant four-beat pulse. Any deviation or change to that pulse is more noticeable because of the expectations Carl sets in the beginning. These changes occur in nearly every section and establish an arch-like structure from stability to instability and back. These changes also help emphasize the juxtaposition of styles. The jump between modernist sounds and American musical traditions creates a tapestry of styles with equal validity. Robert Carl establishes a musical collage that places aesthetic importance on historical American styles.

Both *Swing Shift* and *Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen* present historic music and styles in a modern context. Both works are unified despite the presence of disparate styles and harmonic/melodic treatments. They represent a portion of Carl's many works that feature historicism and time as an abstract phenomenon. They also parallel many of Kramer's characteristics of musical postmodernism, specifically merging modernist-sounding and historical musical materials, relating vernacular music (and occasionally hymnody) to Western art music, avoiding totalized forms through discontinuous and non-linear structures, and quoting or referencing music outside classical traditions.

While the very presence of historical music and temporal abstractions in Carl's music merit examination, they also lay the groundwork for his later harmonic practices. Concrete features of what can be considered Carl's harmonic language appear in the early 2000s. It is as though crafting works that reveal structures over time—sculptures that revealed facets through rotation—allowed for Carl to then focus on what types of structures to reveal.

## CHAPTER 3

### HARMONIC AND SPATIAL STRUCTURES

The evolution of harmonic practices in Robert Carl's music paralleled his shift from concrete historicism to non-linear structures. His harmonic practices grew out of the modernist language of his teachers and evolved over the 1980s and '90s into a loosely defined concern for horizontal and vertical spaciousness. Earlier works relied on harmony that developed through the use of pitch collections. In many of his works that closely parallel postmodernism, harmony becomes more localized in relation to tonal and atonal segments within a piece. Other pieces concerned with texture develop pitch collections localized to registers. Abstracting time within the form of a piece opened up new harmonic possibilities. Carl's music shifted from textural concerns to harmonic procedures. Over time, Carl codified his ideas of spaciousness into a practice involving structures he identified as harmonic ladders. This practice has provided Carl a means for cohesion in his music that extends beyond formal unity.

#### *Rotating Structures*

While Robert Carl was exploring narrative procedures as part of his musical language, he was also exploring textural ideas that would evolve in the early 2000s as a harmonic practice. The same ideas that pushed him to consider form as the internal relationship of music over time pushed him to consider new textural and harmonic procedures. Carl considered his

textural ideas as a continuation of formal concepts. His sculptural concept of form translated into a sculptural concept of harmony. Though loosely defined in his music of the 1980s and '90s, the juxtaposition of textures and pitch groupings reveals a clear and purposeful practice oriented toward horizontal and vertical space. Pitch relationships run the gamut from tonal to non-tonal and are secondary to the orientation of these groupings.<sup>1</sup> Other musical parameters, such as time and register, provide flexibility to orient these pitch groupings in a cohesive manner.

*Roundabout*, written in 1985 for longtime collaborator Robert Black, is a spacious work for double bass and fixed media.<sup>2</sup> The work features sound masses of electronically generated overtones above implied and explicit fundamentals played as drones on the bass. The drones diminish in length as the bass moves to new fundamentals. Harmonic shifts in the electronics pivot around the movement of these drones. As the work progresses, the bass begins to play treble-register melodic passages as counterpoint to its drones. The work features vertical space between drone and partials that is highlighted by electronic and acoustic textures. The spacious durations between each harmonic pivot also provides horizontal space.

One of Carl's early piano pieces that suggests spaciousness is *The Big Room*, written in 1993. It is a meditative work with no apparent linear structure. Occasional, low-register pitches struck with intensity (all marked *sforzando*) serve as pillars defining space within the

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<sup>1</sup> Carl has noted in interviews his distaste of the term 'atonal' and has adopted 'non-tonal' in its place. The term is helpful when describing the intuitive shifts between consonance and dissonance in his music. (Molly Sheridan, "Robert Carl: The Time Keeper.")

<sup>2</sup> Robert Black is currently known as the bassist for the Bang on a Can All-Stars. At the time of this work he was a member of the Extension Works ensemble, based in Boston. He also teaches at the Hartt School, where he and Carl continue their collaborations.



work, both the horizontal space between each section and the vertical pitch space above each low strike. Quiet melodies, trills, and overtones drift throughout the upper register, giving an ethereal quality to material within sections. Kyle Gann notes that this piece has a “tendency toward circular rather than linear form,”<sup>3</sup> that results from the meandering pace between each drone-like pillar. Each section maintains an individual pace and there is no linear impulse driving the piece from drone to drone. Rather, each section appears as several facets of a single structure built upon textural and pitch groupings.

Carl’s 1998 piece for string trio, *Open*, is less fragmented and solidifies much of the textural spaciousness in earlier works. An extended, single-movement work for two violins and cello, the piece features localized moments of tonality. It opens with angular, dissonant lines shrouded in consonant space provided by harmonics and slow glissandi that converge on open intervals. The vertical space between dissonances and consonances allows them to be heard simultaneously. As the piece progresses, the two layers converge with lush, chromatic harmonies reminiscent of late Romanticism. There are several such climaxes in the work followed by the return of angular lines and glissandi. It is as though the listener is examining an open framework from multiple vantage points and all aspects of consonance, dissonance, texture, and register are present depending upon the point of view. *Open* achieves a conceptual spaciousness that would usher in new harmonic practices in the next millennium. The open framework that revealed features over time would become the model for how Carl revealed unified pitch collections. He calls these collections harmonic ladders and they form the basis of his harmonic practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Kyle Gann, Liner Notes to *Piano Works of Robert Carl* (Centaur Records), 3.

### Harmonic ladders

Robert Carl's harmonic ladders feature pitch collections based on one or more overtone series. As shown in figure 3.1, one ladder is a collection of partials generated by ascending the harmonic series of a given fundamental. The first instance of each pitch-class is kept within the collection and octave equivalencies are ignored. Each partial is kept in the register in which it first appears, leading to an ordered, ascending collection of diminishing intervals.<sup>4</sup>

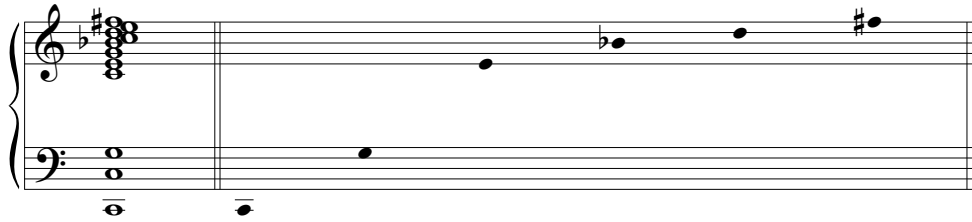


FIGURE 3.1. Overtone series and resulting harmonic ladder

In many cases, multiple ladders combine to generate larger pitch-networks. Figure 3.2 shows how Carl expands these collections, generating new ladders by using each pitch of the initial ladder as a “pivot.” Each pitch becomes the fundamental of a new series of ordered, ascending partials. The distance between the lower partials is great enough that octave equivalencies are used when necessary to maintain a performable range for new ladders. Performable range is also considered within single ladders, such as in *River's Bend* (analyzed below) where octave equivalencies are used for all partials.

<sup>4</sup> The final three pitches in Figure 3.1 appear to create consecutive major 3<sup>rd</sup> intervals; however, this is due to mapping a harmonic series onto an equal-tempered scale. As discussed below, whole number harmonic relationships result in pitches that differ in frequency from equal tempered pitches. In just-intonation, higher partials continue to generate smaller and smaller intervals.

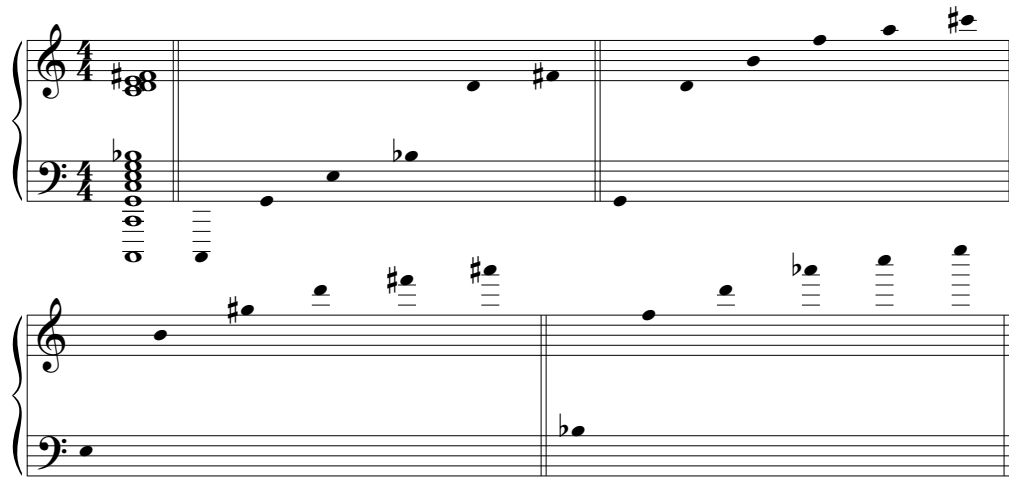


FIGURE 3.2. Network of four harmonic ladders in relation to C fundamental

Each ladder can be considered a musical sculpture—an object with physical space existing as music. Horizontal and vertical implementation within the music reveal features of this sculpture. Every ladder contains a tonal center—the fundamental on which the ladder is based. However, no portion of the ladder (beyond the first three pitches) sounds diatonic. Ascending the ladder reveals increasingly dissonant intervals and pitches in relation to the fundamental and earlier partials. Consonance and dissonance take on spatial relations within the music.

Some networks, such as those seen in Figure 3.2, feature multiple pivots among ladders—not just the first pitch of each collection. These additional pivots are possible because of equivalencies within equal-temperament. In an equal-tempered system, Carl maps pitches within the ascending ladder to like pitch-classes. Doing so maintains the theoretical ladder construct, though many of the upper partials deviate from their mathematically pure

relationship (usually by 50 or fewer cents). In some cases, Carl uses networks based on just-intonation, preserving the simple, whole-number harmonic relationships. However, the pitch-class equivalencies among ladders become separated by syntonic commas and other microtonal deviations. Carl regularly makes use of both tuning systems, noting that within his sculptural framework both are “close enough for jazz.”<sup>5</sup> The exact intervallic relationships within one ladder or a group of ladders is secondary to spaciousness and density. Carl has even written works that co-mingle instruments working in both tuning systems.

*Changing My Spots* is the earliest work to outline Carl’s harmonic ladders. Written in 2005 for open instrumentation, it provides a framework in which any number of musicians improvise over a network of ladders. The score as shown in figure 3.3 consists of six harmonic ladders connected by multiple pivots that direct musicians to shift their improvisations from one collection to another. It assumes an equal-tempered scale used by all musicians as it guides the players through the network. Equivalencies are used as pivot points to draw musicians from one ladder to another. Octave equivalencies are ignored and each musician only plays pitches available within the middle range of his/her instrument. The resulting music is a slowly evolving exploration of spaciousness. The explicit vertical orientation of the framework combined with directed improvisation results in timbral and intervallic facets that are revealed over time. Ascending, descending, and moving between ladders thickens and thins out vertical sonorities and textures over the course of the piece.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with composer, 2018-02-23.

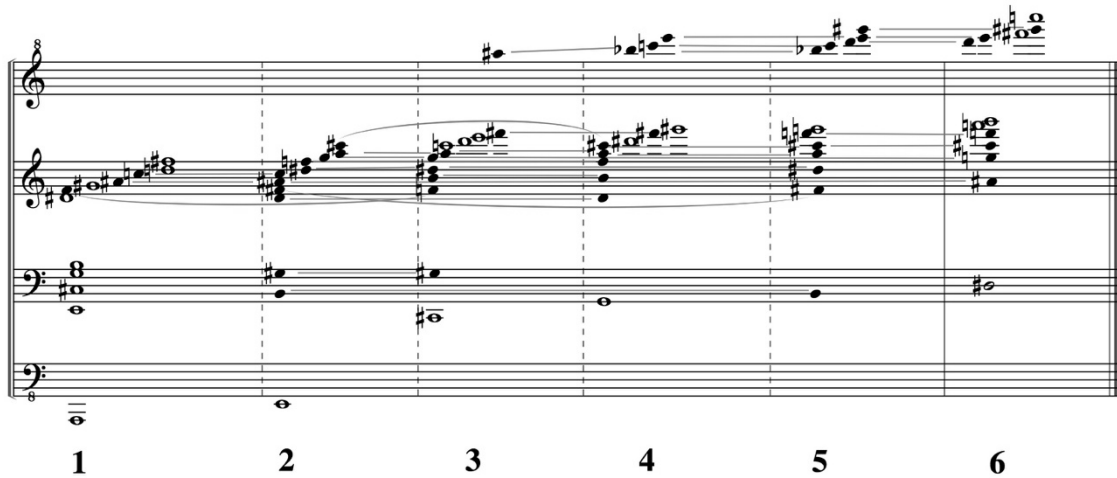


FIGURE 3.3. Score for Robert Carl’s *Changing My Spots* (2005), reprinted by permission of American Composers Edition, Inc. (BMI), Publisher

Carl’s next piece based explicitly on ladders is *Updraft*, for ten trombones and electronics. Written in 2009 for the trombone studio choir at The Hartt School, the work uses the trombone’s natural harmonics to generate a shifting network of ladders that unfold through the course of a sectional canon. Unlike *Changing My Spots*, the acoustic music is completely notated—five parts with two trombones on each part.<sup>6</sup> The electronic part is a fixed recording of low drones. *Updraft* also incorporates octave equivalencies and uses all available pitch-classes, regardless of their position in the ladder. The work is broken into six sections as shown in table 3.1. Within each section, each part uses a designated slide position. Carl uses positions with fundamentals equivalent to the first five pitches of a ladder based on C: C, G, E, B-flat, D. The natural harmonics of each position creates a separate

<sup>6</sup> Carl states in the program notes that each line requires two instruments for both the change in sonority between solo and doubled lines, and to provide breaks to each player as his/her partner takes over the line (Robert Carl, Program notes, *Updraft*, 2009).

ladder.<sup>7</sup> Positions change between sections and are not the same among all players. By using different ladders between sections and parts, Carl slowly reveals the overall harmonic construct. The electronic part reinforces this slow reveal by using drones on pitches from the original ladder. The drone changes in each section until the final section, in which all drones sound simultaneously.

TABLE 3.1. Changes in slide positions and resulting fundamental pitch-classes within *Updraft*

MM	Bass Trombones (P5)		Trombones 1, 2 (P4)		Trombones 3, 4 (P3)		Trombones 5, 6 (P2)		Alto Trombones (P1)	
	Slide	Pitch	Slide	Pitch	Slide	Pitch	Slide	Pitch	Slide	Pitch
1			IV	C	IV	C	IV	C		
11			VII	B	VII	B	IV	C		
36			IV	C	IV	C	VII	B	II	E
43			I	F	IV	C	VII	B	II	E
52	VII	B	IV	C	VII	B	I	F	II	E
108	VII	B	VII	B	IV	C	I	F	II	E

*Updraft* introduces the potential for a mixture of equal-tempered and justly-intoned pitches. The fundamental pitch for each slide position is based on an equal-tempered system, whereas any pitch ascending the ladder is a natural harmonic of the fundamental. Because multiple ladders are used simultaneously, there are pitch-class equivalencies that are not harmonically equivalent, adding muddiness to some passages. This muddiness reinforces the spaciousness and density Carl is exploring within the overall harmonic construct.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike the “pure” ladder, the natural harmonic series in each position contains octave equivalencies of several partials.

Furthermore, Carl creates a canon in *Updraft* by linking material between sections. “Each line as it occurs is then embedded in the next section... transposed to a different fundamental root, and rhythmically diminished or augmented to fit the proportions of the new section.”<sup>8</sup> There are few changes to each section, leading to a fairly audible canon. Section one features three parts (P2, P3, P4) in unison on a melodic line (M1) with long, sustained notes. In section two (measure 21), P3 and P4 switch slide position and repeat M1 in transposition. P2 continues with a rhythmically faster countermelody (M2) in the original position. In section three (measure 36), M1 is repeated on a new part (P1) at a new transposition with diminished rhythms. P2 begins a new countermelody (M3) with a new slide position. P3 and P4 continue playing M2 at a new transposition with diminished rhythms. This process of introducing new parts, moving melodies between parts, shifting transpositions, and diminishing rhythms continues until section six (measure 108). The final section features P1-P5 playing M1 in rhythmic unison. However, each part is in a separate transposition and slide position, giving a dense, chorale-like end to the piece. The overall arc of slow-fast-slow rhythms and increasingly complex polyphony also emphasizes the spaciousness and density Carl reveals in the harmonic construct.

Written in 2013, *Night Garden* develops a complex network of ladders similar to *Updraft*, though with a greater degree of control. It is “an essay in precise tuning for five contrabasses.”<sup>9</sup> Each musician plays the entire work on one bass string, each on a different string. The quintet effectively becomes five differently tuned monochords, and each line of

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Carl, Program notes, *Updraft*, New York: American Composer Editions, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Carl, Program Notes, *Night Garden*, New York: American Composer Editions, 2013.

the music includes only the natural harmonics of each respective string. The ladder for each part includes the first seven partials of each string, including octave doublings.

As with *Updraft*, the fundamental of each ladder is equal-tempered but the remaining pitches are justly-intoned, in this case played as natural harmonics of each open string.

Although each ladder only contains four unique pitch-classes over the seven partials, any equivalent pitch-classes between parts deviate in their sounding pitch. Table 3.2 shows the harmonic ladders in scientific pitch notation and corresponding frequencies (assuming a standard tuning of A4 as 440Hz). The difference between equivalent pitches increases as the partials move further and further from the equal-tempered fundamental. This disagreement between equal-temperament and just-intonation again adds a degree of muddiness to the music that reinforces ideas of spaciousness and density. With five precise monochords, Carl is able to exert greater control over this facet of the music.

TABLE 3.2. Harmonic ladders in scientific pitch notation and corresponding frequency (Hz) within *Night Garden*

Bass 1		Bass 2		Bass 3		Bass 4		Bass 5	
Pitch	Freq (Hz)	Pitch	Freq (Hz)	Pitch	Freq (Hz)	Pitch	Freq (Hz)	Pitch	Freq (Hz)
C1	32.703	E1	41.203	A1	55.000	D2	73.416	G2	97.999
C2	65.406	E2	82.406	A2	110.000	D3	146.832	G3	195.998
G2	98.109	B2	123.609	E3	165.00	A3	220.248	D4	293.997
C3	130.812	E3	164.812	A3	220.000	D4	293.664	G4	391.996
E3	163.515	G#3	206.015	C#4	275.000	F#4	367.080	B4	489.995
G3	196.218	B3	247.218	E4	330.000	A4	440.496	D5	587.994
Bb3	228.921	D4	288.421	G4	385.000	C5	513.912	F5	685.993

There are three principal sections in *Night Garden*, in addition to a brief introduction. The work opens with a six measure chorale that introduces all unique pitch classes. Each instrument swells in dynamics on their respective partials 1, 3, 5, 7, 3, and 1. The relationship



of each pitch to the others differs from expected frequency ratios in equal temperament, foreshadowing the move from spaciousness to density back to spaciousness in the overall work.<sup>10</sup> The sustained pitches also present a rhythmically spacious opening.

The first section (mm. 7-31) features a rhythmically sparse, pointillist texture. There are four repetitions of a single melody that is passed among all five parts. At the end of each iteration, the quintet repeats a chord consisting of 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> partials of each instrument (B-flat, G-sharp, C-sharp, F-sharp, and F-natural). Additional pitches harmonize the melody with each iteration. By the final iteration, all parts are playing above or below the melody. In the third and fourth iterations, the melody is shortened and undergoes rhythmic augmentation. Despite changes in meter and duration, the first section is entirely homophonic and remains spacious. The added harmony become denser, though the music remains mostly open.

The second section (mm. 32-74) features a slow-moving canon and chorale-like end. The canon begins with a five measure phrase in the lowest part. All other parts enter with the same phrase every one to two measures at various transpositions. Each subject entrance is rhythmically equivalent with a similar melodic contour.<sup>11</sup> The canon continues with shortened repetitions of the phrase in different parts at different repetitions. The phrase segments maintain the same rhythms as the opening phrase until the final repetition which features diminished rhythms in all parts. The canon concludes with all parts sustaining a






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<sup>10</sup> The frequency ratios between pitches in *Night Garden* actually stay constant because of just-intonation. Frequency ratios between similar pitches in equal-temperament would shift while ascending the ladder. This constancy is what sounds different.

<sup>11</sup> The exact melody differs based on the starting partial for each part. The melodic contour is based on the distance between partials and not exact intervals which cannot be reproduced at different positions.

chord. Following a brief rest, the section continues with a five-part chorale. The lowest part plays a rhythmically augmented variation of the opening phrase with the four upper parts sustaining chords every three measures. The layered rhythms and changes in pitch material increase the overall density of the work as the music reveals more of the initial harmonic construct.

TABLE 3.3. Phrase repetitions and durations for nested palindromes within each part of *Night Garden*

Part	Duration	Repetitions of Phrase A and Retrograde A(r)
1		A   A(r)   A
2		[A(r)   A] x 2
3		[A   A(r)   A   A(r)   A(r)   A   A(r)   A] x 4
4		A   A(r)
5		A   A(r)

The final section (mm. 75-97) features a harmonic mensuration canon.<sup>12</sup> It features the greatest variety of rhythm and pitch material, revealing even greater density of the harmonic construct. Each line features a unique duration for all notes within that part (see table 3.3). The canon features a nine note phrase that moves forward and in retrograde that results in nested palindromes throughout the section.<sup>13</sup> The third line is significantly faster than all other parts and establishes an eighth-note pulse over which elongated phrases unfold.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Carl, Program Notes, *Night Garden*, New York: American Composer Editions, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> The third part features tied notes between phrases that can be interpreted as one or two notes.

The formal construction of this section is not as audible as the previous section. However, the resulting rhythmic and pitch density reveal the harmonic construct in its entirety. Procedure is secondary to the soundscape.

### *Analysis of River's Bend*

*River's Bend* is an ideal work to examine Carl's concept of harmonic structures. Written for two flutes, Carl completed the work in 2011 for Janet Arms, the flute professor at The Hartt School. It makes use of one harmonic ladder to portray the image of water flowing along a 'U' shaped-curve in a river. The music develops over several sections that intensify in character as the music reveals more of the harmonic structure.

Carl notes that "the music is a series of passes over the [river] curve, each time growing longer and more detailed as though one approaches and eventually enters the water."<sup>14</sup> This image is reinforced with a gradual introduction of greater partials in relation to pitch class C as the fundamental. Pitch class C remains an implied tonal center throughout the work, though as the piece introduces greater partials the melodic lines feature increasingly unexpected intervals. By the time the 27<sup>th</sup> partial is introduced, both melodic lines are drawing from all 12 (equal-tempered) pitch classes, allowing for dense and seemingly atonal passages. However, there is no change in tonality, and it is more appropriate to refer to this process as a harmonic densification.

The piece also portrays the image of passing over a river's bend with rhythmic and melodic lines that interact to suggest fluidity and water moving at various rates. There are passages in which both flutes move independently, creating a sense of free counterpoint. In other passages, the two flutes move in varying degrees of rhythmic and melodic canon. The

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Carl, Program note, *River's Bend*, New York: American Composer Editions, 2011.

amount of interaction between both parts help reinforce images of eddies, meandering water, and swift rapids.

*River's Bend* is a through-composed work featuring four sections denoted with double lines that coincide with changes in character, rhythm, and harmonic density (see table 3.4). Each section increases in length. The latter sections feature several additional changes in character that appear to break the piece into eight sub-sections as shown below.

Ultimately, the structure of sections is not as important as the gradual progression of melodic character, rhythm, and harmonic density.

TABLE 3.4. Division of sections within *River's Bend*

Section	Sub-section	Measures	Reason for Section Break
1	1	1-9	Double line; harmonic change
2	2	10-22	Double line; harmonic change
3	3	23-35	Harmonic change; tempo shift
	4	36-45	Double line; harmonic change
4	5	46-70	Double line; harmonic change; tempo shift; character change
5	6	71-89	Harmonic change; character change
	7	90-99	Harmonic change; character change
	8	100-114	Double bar line

The first section (mm. 1-9) begins with both flutes in free-flowing counterpoint and quickly changing meters. Neither flute repeats a strict rhythmic pattern or converges with the other flute's rhythms, resulting in two independent lines without any sense of pulse. The second flute is a shadow of the first, beginning two measures after the first, maintaining quieter dynamics throughout the section, and following similar melodic contours to the first. The two lines are not directly related rhythmically, though they are both moving slowly. The

fastest measures feature triplet quarter-notes. This section features only partials 1 to 7, resulting in fairly open intervals between pitch classes C, E, G, and B-flat.

The second section (mm. 10-22) continues the free-flowing counterpoint between the two flutes but at a faster tempo. The second flute is again a shadow of the first, beginning two measures after the first and maintaining a quieter dynamic range. However, the second flute is no longer following a similar melodic contour. It slowly descends and meanders as the first flute moves faster with passages of eighth- and sixteenth-notes. The harmonic density increases to include partials 9 and 11. Most melodic movement is triadic and occasionally traverses adjacent pitch classes (now C, D, E, F-sharp, G, and B-flat).

The third section (mm. 23-35) features a greater increase in tempo and continues the free-flowing counterpoint. The second flute again begins two measures after the first, but starts to assert an independent character while the first flute retains its faster passages. Both lines have similar dynamic figures and meander through shifting meters and rhythms, but are also converging on the same note that opens the next section. The harmonic density increases in this section to include partials 13 and 15. There are fewer intervallic jumps in this section. Most passages feature direct movement between adjacent pitch classes (now C, D, E, F-sharp, G, A-flat, B-flat, and B-natural) that sound similar to whole-tone scale patterns.

Section four (mm. 36-45) marks the first convergence of the flute lines. After merging in measures 36-37, the two lines move in free-flowing counterpoint but in equal importance. Both lines maintain similar dynamic ranges that swell at different points for each line, allowing each flute to jump into the foreground. Both flutes maintain overlapping but separate pitch ranges – the first flute from C5 to B $\flat$ 6 and the second flute from F $\sharp$ 4 to G5 – that allow each to be heard clearly. The harmonic density is the same as the previous section,

including all partials up to the 15<sup>th</sup>. Other than a few large intervallic jumps in measures 39 and 41, both lines feature direct movement between adjacent pitch classes and continue to sound similar to whole-tone scale patterns. The section ends with an acceleration into measure 45.

According to the double-bar divisions and change in tempo, measure 45 could be considered the first measure of section five; however, the character description of “suddenly still and lyrical, a moment of reflection,” at measure 46 suggests the previous measure is merely a pivot into measures 46-70. Carl matches this character with seven measures of pitches sustained for longer durations and a mid-measure fermata in measure 52. The second flute retains this sustained and reflective character for the remainder of this section. The first flute builds into a faster and lyrical character. Motives repeat with slight rhythmic and melodic variation. The melodic phrase from measures 52-54 repeats in measures 55-57 with a register change to the opening note and a complete change to the end. Measures 59-62 repeat another motive four times in a descending sequence with notes added to some repetitions. These inexact repetitions reinforce the image of water currents that share similar contours but with miniscule variations.

Section five also highlights changes to the river image by including partials 17 and 19 (and two brief jumps to partials 21 and 27). While the first flute features contours with a mix of intervals, the second flute maintains a meandering character that moves between adjacent pitch classes. The harmonic density increases to include more chromatic movement and fewer tonal intervals (in relation to C). The complete set of pitches available includes C, C-sharp, D, E-flat, E, F-sharp, G, A-flat, B-flat, and B. Enharmonic alterations are used as well when necessary for clarity of the musical line.

Section six (mm. 71-89) begins with the piece's fastest tempo, a tempo that defines all remaining sections. Although there is no description at measure 71, the music clearly establishes a character of bubbling currents and coursing rapids that continue to interact for the rest of the piece. The music is at its peak harmonic density featuring partials 21 and 27 throughout. All 12 pitch classes are present in this section and many passages feature chromatic movement. Both flutes converge on a repeating sextuplet sixteenth-note pattern in measure 73 based on a motive that appears in measure 71. They maintain a constant stream of sextuplets through the rest of the section.

As the section develops, both flutes deviate melodically from the original motive, eventually settling on a new sixteenth-note sextuplet pattern at the end of measure 78 that continues to repeat in one or both flutes for the rest of the section. However, at measure 82 both lines deviate more and more from the motive until it repeats three final times in measures 86 and 87. Both lines swell in dynamics at different times and occasionally rest for a beat, giving emphasis to each part at different times. Neither flute is dominant and both are heard as part of an overall bubbling character. This back-and-forth continues until measures 87-89, when the lines synchronize rhythmically and dynamically (and occasionally melodically).

Section seven (mm. 90-99) slowly reduces overall harmonic density while speeding up the rhythms of passages. Several measures feature one or both lines playing  $\frac{1}{2}$  step trills. Measures 92-94 feature flourishes of thirty-second-notes. Though the section begins with the 21<sup>st</sup> partial present, most of the section includes only up to partial 19. Many of the passages are a mix of ascending and descending chromatic and whole-tone figures according to the

smaller pitch set (C, C-sharp, D, E-flat, E, F-sharp, G, A-flat, B-flat, and B-natural) that sound less dense than the previous section.

TABLE 3.5. Maximum partial ( $M_p$ ) for each measure (MM) of *River's Bend*

MM	$M_p$	MM	$M_p$	MM	$M_p$	MM	$M_p$
1	1	31	13	61	21	91	19
2	5	32	13	62	27	92	17
3	7	33	15	63	17	93	19
4	7	34	13	64	27	94	19
5	7	35	13	65	15	95	19
6	7	36	11	66	19	96	19
7	7	37	11	67	13	97	19
8	7	38	11	68	15	98	19
9	5	39	15	69	19	99	19
10	11	40	15	70	21	100	9
11	11	41	15	71	27	101	11
12	9	42	15	72	21	102	9
13	11	43	13	73	21	103	11
14	11	44	13	74	21	104	9
15	11	45	7	75	27	105	11
16	11	46	7	76	21	106	7
17	11	47	19	77	27	107	7
18	11	48	19	78	21	108	7
19	9	49	17	79	19	109	7
20	9	50	7	80	27	110	7
21	11	51	13	81	15	111	7
22	5	52	7	82	27	112	7
23	5	53	19	83	27	113	7
24	9	54	7	84	27	114	7
25	15	55	19	85	27	115	7
26	15	56	13	86	27		
27	13	57	5	87	27		
28	13	58	13	88	27		
29	15	59	17	89	27		
30	13	60	27	90	21		

Rhythmic complexity and harmonic density continue to diminish in the final section (mm. 100-114). The entire section maintains near-unison rhythms in two blocks of diminishing harmonic density. Measures 100-105 include up to partial 11. This block highlights the partial with jumps between G and D. These jumps alternate with passages



ascending and descending the full pitch collection (C, D, E, F-sharp, G, and B-flat). The remaining music only includes up to partial 7, matching the beginning sound of open intervals between pitch classes C, E, G, and B-flat. Measures 106-111 feature trills in one line and flutter-tongue articulations in the other, a brief reminder of the previous section. The piece settles into three final measures of constant sextuplet sixteenth-notes in both lines.

There are brief increases and decreases in harmonic density that color the overall work. Discussing the maximum partial present for each section does not take these fluctuations into account. Table 3.5 displays the maximum partial present within each measure. The general increase and decrease of partials within each section is visible, as are the minor fluctuations that result in alternating passages of “consonance” and “dissonance.”

This gradual shift of pitch material and intervals is the dominant feature of *River's Bend*. Moving between sections and even measures, the listener hears a gradual increase and decrease of dissonance in relation to a low C fundamental. This gradual shift reinforces Carl's intended image of a winding river, as does the shift in rhythmic activity. *River's Bend* demonstrates the use of one harmonic ladder revealed over time. Though the framework is simpler than other works based upon multiple ladders, Carl still explores harmonic spaciousness and density in a manner similar to his works with complex pitch networks.

By exploring spaciousness and density as facets of a fixed network or ladder, Carl has developed a harmonic practice that can be understood as frameworks or sculptures revealed over time. These harmonic sculptures rotate through the course of works such as *River's Bend*, *Updraft*, and *Night Garden* to reveal facets that are consonant or dissonant in relationship to each other. These frameworks rotating through time are an extension of the rotating structures he used to approximate temporal abstractions as well, revealing music

without a fixed harmonic practice in a non-linear manner. Aspects of postmodernism, particularly historicism, spurred some of this non-linear thinking, though harmonic ladders and pitch networks are the dominant features of his latter works. While historicism and harmony may not appear to be overlapping musical features, Carl's journey as a composer honing his craft has linked these features as aspects of his musical development.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Not much has been written about Robert Carl or his music. The truism “always the bridesmaid, never the bride,” is unfortunately appropriate for this composer-critic who has written nearly 1,100 articles and reviews on the music of his contemporaries. Carl’s music is equally deserving of discussion as that which he reviews. His music connects to trends within American concert music going back to Charles Ives. His musical voice is a clear extension of latter twentieth century changes to music in the States and abroad. He has adopted an open stance toward style in a manner that has interconnected composers since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Like the many facets within his pieces, he is one of many links in the web of contemporary practice.

This thesis examined conceptual and practical applications within Carl’s music that unify his works and connect them to the works of contemporaries. These features of his music include historicism, pluralism, non-sequential forms, and harmonic structures. These stylistic features are not common to all works but underline his evolving methods to achieve unity and clarity within his music. Analyzing these works and examining his reasons for

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<sup>1</sup> Carl highlights openness, multiplicity, and tension between the individual and the collective as factors that are drawing twenty-first century composers closer and closer together. However, these factors are the result of practices that have been evolving since the 1970s. These practices connected composers of that generation (perhaps to a lesser degree) just as today.

adopting particular styles illuminates the openness that exists within his music, openness Carl sees as a general trend among contemporary composers as well.

Historicism and abstractions of time within his music points to an openness that Carl has adopted conceptually. His works that link disparate styles and materials from past and present create a unified experience from many sources. Linking musical material in cumulative forms and other non-sequential structures unifies the music by connecting it to an external, conceptual source. A musical structure exists even if not seen in sequence.

*Nach(t[raum]) ist Kommen* borrows a Lutheran chorale as its structure but only displays portions of that structure so that its surface features are a warped, Neoclassical copy. Other material in the work is presented in different styles, separating each facet of the original chorale. *Swing Shift* blends an even greater variety of styles, unified by a driving pulse. Mainstream jazz, Latin styles, and other vernacular facets are exposed between angular gestures. These facets are further bound by a macro-level blues progression that unifies the disparate American musical traditions. In both works, and many other early pieces, Carl openly links music and styles for an essential, musical purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Harmonic and spatial structures within Carl's music points to a more concrete application of openness. He develops vertical and horizontal space based on harmonic ladders and pitch networks that merge equal-tempered and justly-intoned collections. These ladders and networks guide the relative density and space within a work. As different facets of the structure are revealed over time, the music increases and decreases in complexity.

*River's Bend* was one such piece displaying changes to vertical and horizontal space, relying

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<sup>2</sup> Carl has adopted the term "essential music" as a way to describe what is necessary for a piece to communicate its meaning, regardless of systems or extra-musical influences used to compose the work.

on one ladder as the basis for its shifting density. As seen in his other works, expanding the initial structure on which pieces are based does not result in proportionally denser music. Rather, larger structures provide more material for Carl to explore and reveal through larger horizontal spaces.

Carl and his music are connected to American composers spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This has been noted in his stated influences, such as Ives, and in traits shared with other American composers, notably a harmonic affinity with Ben Johnston and John Luther Adams.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Iannis Xenakis, Carl has studied with composers who fall within a narrative of American musical developments. His music draws on and extends practices associated with the so-called American Mavericks, from Ives to Ruggles, Cage, Carter, and Shapey.<sup>4</sup> An emphasis on rugged individualism and clear communication of an “essential music” tie Carl to composers who abandoned or never adopted mainstream styles.<sup>5</sup> However, Carl does not advocate an anti-establishment position. In fact, he favors pluralism and an open stance to style that can be traced to the advent of postmodernism and minimalism in the 1970s.

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Johnston and John Luther Adams are recognized for crafting symphonic and chamber music that meticulously blend equal-temperament with justly-intoned harmonic worlds. Robert Carl’s music approaches a similar harmonic mix, though from a different vantage. It is easier to consider all three as three separate extensions of Harry Partch and his music, rather than one continuous path.

<sup>4</sup> American Mavericks is a loosely defined term for what has also been called the American Experimental Tradition. These composers favored experimental or anti-traditionalist methods “founded upon the principal of freedom.” (Kyle Gann, “What is a Maverick?” American Mavericks, American Public Media. [http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/essay\\_gann01.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/essay_gann01.html))

<sup>5</sup> The term “essential music” is particularly appropriate for experimentalists who thwart or ignore contemporary styles or practices but seek other means of conveying meaning within works.

The pluralistic stance Carl adopts in his music is another reason it is worth examining. His practice is an extension of changes that surfaced in American concert music in the 1970s and 1980s. Modernism in America had shattered, and out of the rubble came a number of co-existing styles and practices in a quantity not seen since the fracturing of Romanticism around World War I. However, the many styles that took the place of Modernism did not coalesce into a new universal practice as had occurred after the War. Instead, these practices have evolved into a comfortably co-equal stance. There is little tension in today's multiplicity of neo-Romanticism, postminimalism, European spectralism, classical-vernacular blends, and American "precise tuning practices."<sup>6</sup> Carl's music reflects this, as do his writings.

Studying Carl's music sheds light on the pluralism he and others have adopted over the past thirty years. Many of these composers are less dogmatic when approaching style and are more concerned with achieving meaningful resonance within their works. Meaningful resonance has multiple meanings in this context, all of which speak to an internal unity, coherence, and physical connections between material. There are concrete and conceptual aspects to this kind of meaningful resonance, both of which can be found in Carl's music.

Carl has even gone so far as to identify this goal of meaningful resonance in his writings as one aspect of a conceptual common practice that has emerged in the past decades. His manuscript, *Survivable Music*, is a series of essays that broadly examines trends and styles in Western art music since the 1970s. It discusses the interconnectedness of seemingly

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<sup>6</sup> A term John Luther Adams has adopted for music using microtonal, artificial, and unequal temperament systems. (See Robert Carl, "A Ringing in Our Ears," *Survivable Music*, unpublished).

disparate practices that have evolved within Western art music. In an effort to find those connections, Carl arrived at the descriptor “survivable music” as that which:

...is written with the hope of a life that goes beyond its moment of birth, maybe even beyond the creator’s life. It tends to have certain *strengths of conception and construction* that demonstrate exceptional craft and imagination, though these can be *wildly diverse and mutually exclusive from one work to another*.<sup>7</sup>

Carl has developed a musical practice that provide a flexible conceptual and harmonic framework for his compositions. Rather than adopting a style with strict parameters, he favors an open framework that allows him to arrive at an “essential music.” Carl continues to explore open frameworks within his music. Though such openness is less identifiable as a strict musical style, it comes through clearly as a conceptual practice. This shapes the harmonic and structural features of his output. This music shares a strong connection with the open plurality advocated and displayed by numerous American composers of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also exhibits a free layering of materials present in the music of Ives, Rochberg, Xenakis, and others who thought of new ways to achieve unity in works through non-sequential forms. An affinity for spaciousness may be the most readily apparent attribute to Carl’s growing body of works. He draws on pluralistic ideas that co-exist in his music without drawing attention to their differences, creating a unified experience through their inclusion. He constructs and examines harmonic structures that expand and contract based on the focal point within a work. He uses these conceptual and physical attributes to develop horizontal and vertical space within pieces. This openness may be the principal hallmark of his mature style. It is certainly a factor that pushes his music to be meaningful, coherent, and

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Carl, “What’s in a Name?” *Survivable Music* (unpublished, emphases added).

truly survivable. However, Robert Carl is still actively composing and it will be interesting to hear what new influences shape his sound next.



## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT CARL, NOVEMBER 16, 2016, 5:30PM AT THE HARTT SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Robert Carl: Recording?

Daniel Morel: Recording. That should suffice for any issues that may come up down the road. So, just for the record, may I have your consent to use this interview for research purposes?

Robert Carl: Yes. And I'm going to stamp it by saying, this is Robert Carl. I'm being interviewed by Daniel Morel. I'm chair of composition at the Hartt School. And I heartedly give consent to this interview and to what I may say.

Daniel Morel: Thank you. I'm very excited about that. And as some of what I've discussed before, a lot of this thesis in going to be looking at how history affects the music of various composers. I know that history has been a big focus of yours for many years. I was just kind of curious if you could explain a little bit about what initially interested you in history?

Robert Carl: Well, I mean, actually in history itself, when I was a kid, it was something that actually ... there's not officially any sort of thing as a history prodigy, but it was a very particular interest that I showed an unusual degree of interest and I think aptitude in.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: I only wanted to read history books. I discovered fiction later in life, I'm happy to say. My initial reading habits as a kid, were history books.

Daniel Morel: The initial love was for non-fiction?

Robert Carl: Yeah. One way that it manifested itself, which was in a very more typical kid way, was that in growing up in the South, in the '60s, which was of course we think of as being the Civil Rights era, but for me as someone who was maybe 10 years old, it was the Civil War Centennial. And so, I was very much of a Civil War buff. I dragged my parents all over the eastern half of the US to battlefields. Revolutionary as well as Civil War, but the Civil War, when you're in the South is the stuff around you all the time.

Daniel Morel: I was going to ask, was that just part of the ethos that it was the time and it was the geography?

Robert Carl: Yes. And I will say, by the way, just FYI, I always sided with the Union. It's very interesting. I know why I'm up here [New England] now. I would go to reenactments and I'd be wearing a blue cap. They didn't kill me or anything like that. "Oh, isn't that cute."

Daniel Morel: Well, that's an interesting little tangent and I was hoping to maybe ask this at some point, but in some bios or interviews, the concept of "Southerner in New England" comes up. Is that a mantle that you like to wear?

Robert Carl: Well, you know, yeah. I sort of regard myself, I probably shouldn't say this, but I see myself as an ex-pat, basically. Actually I think at one point, somewhere Kyle Gann wrote in a program note or review or something about me, that I was one of those Southerners who came north and sort of found a home. He mentioned people like Robert Penn Warren and William Styron. He was thinking more of literary figures.

Daniel Morel: Oh, okay.

Robert Carl: There's no doubt that, though I didn't know it at the time that I was a teenager, that there was this kind of felicitous connection with Ives that was going to emerge for me, over time. And that I ended up in his

backyard. As a matter of fact, you don't know this, but this morning we did our field trip to Danbury, for the [Ives] course.

Daniel Morel: Oh, wonderful. Is that an annual tradition [crosstalk 00:03:37]?

Robert Carl: Only when I do the course. I've done the course four times now. And I do it every time.

Daniel Morel: It's a full walk through the Danbury area?

Robert Carl: Yeah. We go down, we went to the birth house, which is not in its original site. It's been moved out to the edge of town, in a park. And then a walk all around the center of town. I have a nice map, with Ives identified residences and buildings and things like that. The Danbury Historical Society, which has a small collection of photographs that are nice, and they brought out the death mask for us to see,-

Daniel Morel: Oh, wow.

Robert Carl: ... which they possess. And then the cemetery, for the family plot, where all the Ives's are. And then, because I had to get back to the rehearsal of this piece of mine, there were a few of the group, we have nine in the course, eight were able to make the field trip. I think maybe about four or five went on to Putnam's camp, which is a State Park, Putnam Memorial, which I've been to many times, but I just couldn't do it this time. Now with GPS, they don't need to follow or anything like that. They just plug it in and I can leave.

Daniel Morel: You can get to those spots immediately. That really is a wonderful way to connect that history and music.

Robert Carl: Yeah. It makes it rather visceral. And I would say, by the way, I think this is actually related to your topic, what I'm talking about right now. The other thing that we've done is, the West Hartford Reservoir, which I think you know, it's off Farmington Avenue.

Daniel Morel: Yes.

Robert Carl: You can walk all the way around it, maybe about an hour and 15-minute walk, as a loop, is where Charles and Harmony took a walk,

where basically he proposed to her. They opened their hearts and became betrothed on October 22nd, 1907. And so, I've done this once before, we took the class and we did a walk. The first time we did it two years ago, I think, it was actually on the day, it was on the anniversary. In this case, it was just a couple of days off. But, we used it as a chance to have a peripatetic discussion of Essays Before a Sonata.

Daniel Morel: That's a fantastical tie-in from all angles.

Robert Carl: Right.

Daniel Morel: And that actually kind of-

Robert Carl: And by the way, the autumn color was unbelievable.

Daniel Morel: I bet.

Robert Carl: It was the very peak.

Daniel Morel: I imagine so. And speaking of Ives and Yale, Yale I gather, is where you began to shift your interest towards music.

Robert Carl: Yes. It was.

Daniel Morel: I'm curious, was ... I mean, besides studying with the late, great Jonathan Kramer, were there any other factors that really pushed you more towards music at that point?

Robert Carl: Well, you know, and here I will say, I hate to be like a broken record, but I think, Ives very much so, because you see, I was there during his centennial. My spring sophomore and fall junior years were '74. That was the Ives centennial. And so, Yale went all out. They played a huge amount of stuff. I heard not, obviously not everything, but every possible medium. I heard works orchestral, chamber, solo, vocal, choral. I remember, I heard John Kirkpatrick play the Concord Sonata, things like that.

That was kind of life changing because it was just so ... it was an amazing permission for one thing. I was getting more and more

involved. If it had been the Brahms centennial, I would have ended up a lawyer, I suspect, because if it had been so perfect as to be untouchable. But the thing about Ives, is that it's very open. It's very welcoming. It's very unafraid to have rough edges. And by the way, the more you look at it, the more amazing it gets. I mean, it's really astonishing music.

Robert Carl: But on the surface, it can look a little messy, and like, "Oh, well, he didn't really care about this one [inaudible 00:07:51]." Well, he did. But it does give much more permission to a young composer.

Daniel Morel: Absolutely.

Robert Carl: I think that was something that was really important for me, as a ... And as a matter of fact, the thing is, that the turning point for me just career wise there, was that they had, in my senior year, an undergraduate composition competition for the orchestra. I don't know if you know this or not. I don't like to repeat the story and this is not really so much about me as about history, but I wrote a piece and I won it. And I wasn't a music major.

The piece, was in some ways, had lots of elements that were sort of a cop of the Ives 4th Symphony, but condensed into 10 minutes.

Daniel Morel: Okay. So you got a taste of the music life with the competition.

Robert Carl: Listen, when I heard ... actually when I heard that I had ... was notified that I had won it, I just took all my law school applications and flushed them down the toilet. And was willing to make the plunge and see what would happen.

But anyway, I do want to go back to one thing about history.

Daniel Morel: Absolutely.

Robert Carl: But this is now more of a history art connection. Like those battlefields, I will say that I don't ever remember myself running around imagining gore and severed limbs and the sort of slasher movie type, what it was really like. It was much more poetic for me.

Robert Carl: American battlefields, though they're extremely varied, can be sort of like sculpture parks. They're often these very beautiful pastoral bucolic, often great natural beauty. And often more out of the way. With these interventions of a sign here or a monument there or a cannon there. And there's something very mysterious about the sense of what happened then and what it is like now. And there are just these very small concretizations of the past, that are in a landscape. And I found that, to this day, I find that very, very, sort of evocative a moving.

And I think that my reaction to them, though I wouldn't have known to call it that at the time, was more aesthetic. Though, believe me, it's not like I was saying, "Oh, well this is an incipient experience of aesthetic site specific work." No. I was, when I was 15 years old, I wasn't going to be thinking that way. I was more like, "Oh, here comes the next stop. Let's read that sign."

Daniel Morel: More of an in-the-moment or [crosstalk 00:10:48]-

Robert Carl: Yeah, right.

Daniel Morel: ... experience.

Robert Carl: I'm still a kid, I was just a kid. But I look back on it now, the fact that I still enjoy doing it, I think that's the reason. It's not just arrested ... I hope it's not just arrested development.

Daniel Morel: Well, no, it sounds like it is a historical moment that's imprinted in multiple levels.

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: And I'm just curious, today's generation of course, we have the Ken Burns documentaries, and so, when you talk about poetic association, my generation can play the film scores in our heads while we're going through, but was there any kind of artistic association in your generation? Literary or otherwise?

Robert Carl: Not really literary. I hadn't read the Red Badge of Courage until later, for instance. I'm just thinking of things. Ambrose Bierce has a bunch

of stories, Melville has a Civil War poetry, but that was all something I knew later.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: Walt Whitman.

No, it was actually the only, what I would call quote, unquote artist things is that, there were a lot of later 19th century, like Currier & Ives and Kurz and Allison, they were companies that put out prints of battles, battlefield scenes, that were almost cartoon like. And I was very drawn to those.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: They were nothing of great artistic value. They're striking and I look at them. It's still an evocative thing, it's evocative of my childhood.

Daniel Morel: Interesting. No, I was just curious, because each generation has some sort of literary or artistic association.

Robert Carl: But these were not from my generation. These were things from, they would have been late 19th century.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: Late 19th century, that were then reissued, brought back into play during the Centennial.

Daniel Morel: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.

Daniel Morel: If I could maybe just go back to, you mentioned Ives, the newness of listening to Ives, was there other new music that you had been exposed to prior to Yale? What was your experience with new music before that?

Robert Carl: I was just beginning to ... First of all, my engagement with concert music, classical music, whatever you want to call it, was relatively late in high school. I started taking piano lessons, I had, had them as a kid,

and then dropped them. I restarted them in my junior year, so I was late with that.

Robert Carl:

I went to an, in many ways, an excellent school. It was a private school. It was sort of a college theater school, frankly. But it did not have a sterling music program. It had a very nice man who taught piano, who I am grateful to. But mostly, it was the choral that sort of sang neo-Christian type stuff, and musicals. And that was about it. There wasn't a lot of musical, interesting musical activity there.

And so, I just started, more than anything else, collecting records. And interestingly enough, I think the first two classical records that I bought were the Brandenburg Concertos and the Carter Sting Quartets. Now, you may say, "Well, my. Wasn't he a little prodigy?" But, you know, it was just like something that I had read in Stereo Review, because my dad had a record collection. And I saw something about the Carter String Quartets and I said, "[inaudible 00:14:38]." I think it was number one and number two, so it was [non-central 00:14:41]. I said, "I wonder what this is?" And I bought it. I remember thinking, "Well, that's really interesting. It's kind of cool, but how he did know to write that right note, if you have to use all 12 of them?" We're still asking this question.

And so, I did ... Mahler, I discovered from my dad's collection. Was an immediate early love. And Mahler and Ives were a pair, really. They're sort of European and the American bromance, composer bromance there. I remember one of the most important early experiences was like one night getting the Mahler 2nd Symphony, the Resurrection, and the wisdom of that. I was just completely blown away by it.

And I remember, somewhere along the way, I've gotten a recording of Three Places in New England. I remember, bless her, my mother coming in. I was playing the Housatonic, and my mother came in and said, "You know, that's genius, isn't it?" You know, that's great.

Daniel Morel:

Absolutely.

Robert Carl:

That she ... she just heard it. It was one of those things where, the naturalness of it was kind of overwhelming.

So, anyway, ... I was a history major at Yale, and remained so. I'm actually very happy I did that. I wrote my senior thesis with a man



named C. Vann Woodward, as my advisor. If you look him up, he's one of the most important American 20th century historians, in particular the South.

Daniel Morel: I'm sorry, how is his name-

Robert Carl: C, with a ... it's an initial. Vann, V-A-N-N, and then Woodward.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: And though he was a very courtly sort of gentlemen, who you might think of as Colonel Woodward, he was also a very incisive and critical thinker. And about the South, he has a great book called *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, which is like an analysis of the destruction of reconstruction, and the construction of Jim Crow, for instance.

Anyway, I was grateful for that. But I do think that one of the things when I came out of college, because I had made the change. I only applied to music schools, when I was done, was sort of saying, "Oh, gosh. I've crossed the Rubicon. I'm on the other shore. Is there any relationship to who I was then and who I am now?" It was a question that I couldn't allow myself to get too involved with, because if you look back, it's like Orpheus and Eurydice. If you look back too much, it's all over, right?

You sort of have to look ahead. But I think it was something that remained a question. And so, I think a lot of pieces that I wrote for the next 10 years or so, dealt with both using music as a way of time travel through the past. Taking certain gestures or styles or whatever. I have a little piece that I wrote actually when I went to Dartington, which is for double quintet, and it takes Purcell's *Music for a While* and it reveals it over time in a kind of Ives cumulative form way.

I did things like that. I have a movement, it's now the middle movement of my 2nd Piano Sonata, which is called *The Big Room*. You may have even heard, yeah. And it has all these little wisps at different dynamic levels, and seemingly at different distances. That's the illusion. Of wisps of music that seems to be coming from different times and styles and languages. But they're just fragments, all sorting in a floating world.

Robert Carl: I think there was a lot of this, and one of the things about ... that Ives was a lesson in, was the idea of trying to find reconciliation between [irreconcilables 00:19:16]. And of course this is something which was very much emerging in post-modernism at the time. I'm of the generation that came of age aesthetically when post-modernism was taking over, as a movement. I'm, like, basically everyone, I don't feel that what was called quote, unquote, post-modern music as a style, continues ... As a matter of fact, if you hear a piece that's post-modern in this way, it sounds really like a throwback [crosstalk 00:19:50].

But, it was a time of feeling a certain enormous freedom. And a freedom to be retro as well as a freedom to be progressive or to be experimental. And that was in the ethos by the time I was graduated from college and going to graduate school. And really starting to be a musician at all and a composer. As a matter of fact, I feel like I became probably sort of ... I became a composer before I became a musician, by the way.

I feel like now, I don't have to make excuses about my musicianship or whatever. I have great faith in it. But for quite a while, I felt like a spy. It was something that I really loved to do, but of course, I get up and I play the piano in public, but I structure it in such a way that I can fool people into thinking I can play the piano.

It took quite a while to gain a certain degree of confidence so I could say, [inaudible 00:20:53] I'm a musician. I never had problems saying I'm a composer. And indeed, I would say by the way, that when I was in college, I found myself ... a book had just come out, which is called Dictionary of Twentieth-century Music. I think John Vinton was the editor of it. It had lots of composer biographies. I would pour over it and I'd find out which ones had started late and which ones were in order disciplines. Carter got his undergraduate degree in English, which is not surprising, thinking about the way his music is. Things like that, were very important to me, as role models and solaces.

Daniel Morel: Do you think that, and I've read in a couple places, where I think Gann referred to you as a self-identified late bloomer-

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: ... and things like that, interviews. Do you think some of reconciling what it meant to be a musician affected what it meant to include music of the past-

Robert Carl: Very-

Daniel Morel: ... or historical references?

Robert Carl: ... interesting question. Entirely possible. I don't think I would have formulated it that way, but I can see a connection. I think that one of the things I will say, is that over the course of my career writing music, I do feel as though a lot of the sort of historical issues and historicisms, I have shed them. Just so you know.

Because I feel like they were also very important to me, and I haven't said this, as simply a way of learning the craft. There are plenty of pieces I have where I've said I want to do a piece that ... Actually I have a few, though actually it was written somewhat later on, so it was combined with the more spectral stuff. But, I mean, there are various types of pieces where I felt I need to confront this or that technique or style or formal structure or whatever, and try to make sense of it and learn it. I'm going to learn it by writing a piece.

Daniel Morel: Yeah, your piece Duke Meets Mort, feels to me like that's the very essence of confronting different styles-

Robert Carl: Yes. And trying to find a synthesis between them. Not just a fruit salad, but actually where they blend so you really can't ... it already seems like something that's new and integral, rather than just these two things.

Then I have another piece called Time/Memory/Shadow, which is for double sextet. And it's basically string trio and violin, viola, harp. So it's two trios, and one is like a commentator on the other. And the source ... and it's also again a kind of cumulative form thing, where the source of it is a little march that sounds kind of like Elgar, that I wrote when I was just starting to write music in college. And it's unearthed over the course of the piece.

That's a piece where it's a piece about personal history using historical material that is fake history.

Daniel Morel: Well, and that was something I was hoping to jump on. I did manage to pick up a copy of the New Works CD.

Robert Carl: Oh, the Neuma CD?

Daniel Morel: Yeah.

Robert Carl: That has that piece.

Daniel Morel: That has the recording. And to me, it really put an interesting layer on top of going from concrete history to more of a conceptual idea.

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: And that's something that I think it was in your interview with Molly Sheridan, you talk about that too, the idea of moving from the concrete to the abstract.

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: How long of a process do you feel it took, for you to go in that direction? Is this still a continuous process?

Robert Carl: In a way it is. First of all, I will ... I think I've used the term concrete [inaudible 00:24:45] abstract. I'm going to rephrase it a little bit though. In a way, it's almost the opposite. Moving from the more conceptual to the more essential, is a way I might describe it now. Because the stuff which is dealing with style and history, I think, actually was more conceptually motivated.

And over time, as I feel I've developed a practice which comes largely out of my harmonic practice, I feel like the music has gotten closer to a kind of musical essence. And a, what I would call, a naturalism or naturalness, which is of course a loaded term. As soon as you talk about essentialism, you get yourself into all sorts of hot water. I realize that. But I've still got to stand by it, because I'm only talking about the overtones series. I'm not talking society or anything like that.

So, anyway, how long did it take? I sort of date my big turn to around about '98 to 2001. There are a series of pieces that, where I sort of, for myself, figured out how to technically conceive and plan a piece in advance. In a way more than just like, it's going to be these sections

and they're going to be sort of like this, this, and this. More than the standard road maps. Something that basically gave me the idea of what the harmonic content and the proportions, durational proportions of a piece were.

Robert Carl: And how it fit into some sort of large scale scheme, process, progress and maybe even a structure with some sort of metaphoric content as well, which gets us back to concept, I know.

The first piece I wrote that I felt really, it didn't have ... it hadn't figured out what it was doing in a way that I could articulate it. But that doesn't keep me from loving it, and think it's a wonderful piece. That just means Open, which is for string trio.

And then, the pieces after that, I wrote a little strange trio for oboe, cello, and piano. It was commissioned for a German group, it's called Coloring Sound's Scent. And that's the first piece where I really worked out what I nowadays call ladders. They're overtone based series, where the registration preserves in a particular way, even though in equal temperament, overtone relations. And then using multiple such series off different fundamentals and modulating between through pivot, common pivots. Common partials, that serve as pivot tones.

And that is the first piece where I really did that. There's a little bit of it in the final movement of my 2nd String Quartet. There is a little bit of it in the final movement of my 3rd Symphony, which is called World Turned Upside Down, which is actually on the new, New World CD.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: Especially the very ending. The very ending, where it sort of moved beyond the tune. So it's the coda, really.

And then also, a little piece for piano, called From the Ground Up. These are all the sort of, that bunch of them is the source set. And From the Ground Up is almost the Rosetta Stone of the thing.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: And so, these pieces start to be more about my ... how I conceive music, rather than how I hear the history of music. That's where the difference is. But, I will say, that it's not as though I suddenly became totally abstract and was unaware of the past.

One of the things that I have said before, and forgive me because you know me, we've had many conversations-

Daniel Morel: Yeah.

Robert Carl: ... in many roles by now. So, if I'm repeating myself, sorry, you just shut me up. But maybe it's the first time for Mister Tape Recorder there. But dammit now, as soon as I said that I knew I was going to go offtrack. Pull me back, just a little bit, what I was saying.

Daniel Morel: Oh, talking about essential harmonic language.

Robert Carl: Yeah. Yes. That one of the things I've always felt that I'm doing, is that I've been having, throughout my career, but even more now, a kind of robust argument with tradition. A friendly argument, a debate. And not wanting to be cowed by it, though believe me, when you study the really great music there's no way not to be cowed by it. But still, plunging into it, having a respect, saying, what can you teach me? I want to learn. And the same time, saying, I'm not going to be driven mute by your greatness. I want to make my own take on this thing that is the ongoing flow of music in time.

Daniel Morel: It sounds to me almost as if that may be a more direct engagement with history as well.

Robert Carl: Yes.

Daniel Morel: Do you feel-

Robert Carl: Yes.

Daniel Morel: ... that you're able to more appropriately plumb the depths that you want to? And take out of it what you need? As opposed to converting history?

Robert Carl:

Yes, absolutely. And indeed, one of the things that I feel now is that the sort of dialogue of particular composers is more intense and immediate now. Though happily, it tends to happen more after that fact. This piece, that Foot in the Door is doing, which is, I wrote it in the late spring as a piano work. Finished it probably in early summer. And then almost immediately, I decided to orchestrate it. And it's being done by 17 musicians, so it's a chamber orchestra.

And I don't really, usually orchestrate, straight from a piano score. But because I did the advanced orchestration course for the first time last year, and after having looked closely at a bunch of Ravel, I mean, of course, you could look a bunch of Ravel orchestrations of his own piano music and be so totally intimidated, you never want to do it ever. Ever.

But foolish me, I guess it looked like a wonderful challenge to try to find a way of doing something different but analogous. And so, I felt like, yeah. I'm in a little bit of a dialogue with Ravel as I'm doing that.

The piece is, really is a processional. It's a sustained growth piece. In that sense, I think of it as a little bit like, though this is not going back historically very far, but a little bit like a [inaudible 00:31:56] of Time. It has certainly sorts of eruptions, especially in high register, of flurries of activity that are definitely out of Messiaen bird land. And at the same time, it's very crystalline and hockety in places, which feels very Wagner-esque. [inaudible 00:32:17].

But I mean, this all sort of came to me afterwards, but I feel like, yeah, I'm sort of ... Yeah, there's plenty where you can draw connections, temporally, and stylistically and to different composers. But yeah, they come more out of after the thing is done, then it's going to be somebody else to judge whether there's anything original or personal of me in it. But it's not a self-conscious dialogue or multi-logue that's going on there, while I'm writing. That emerges retrospectively.

Daniel Morel:

That's very helpful to know. And it's interesting to hear. It sounds like over the course of this progression with the codification of the harmonic language that has some flexibility to it. It's these other parameters that perhaps are now the source of some of the historic engagement? You mentioned orchestration, or coloration or other [crosstalk 00:33:18]?

Robert Carl:

That's interesting. I'd almost have to think a little bit-

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: ... about particular pieces. I'm trying to remember why I've written when. This piece I'm working on right now, which is an ongoing project, which is called Infinity Avenue, is a MaxMSP patch. I think I may have told you something about it.

It takes the whole overtone ladder structure that I've talked about, but actually has it with the precise tuning and it's all played from laptop. You can either literally play on the keys or you can have degrees of automization, and randomization. And create fields that it will sort of rotate through. It will cycle through fields of tunings.

And that piece feels as though it's very much, so far, and I mean, it's like, it exists as a laptop performance piece. It can be an installation with laptop, which I've done it once for four hours that way. It can, with varying degrees of intervention or not.

This year, we're doing work with it, with a small improvising ensemble, that Matt Sargent is arranging. We're going to do a couple of performances of it in that way. And then the next step is going to be to write a ... to use it as the foundation for a work with chamber orchestra, which I will call my 7th Symphony.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: But the reason I'm bringing all this up is that I feel like this piece is very much in a certain sort of quote, unquote transcendentalist traditions. It's very much about big, open, spacious gestures and harmonic textures that are ambiguously beautiful. That's the way I like to think of it.

It's constantly changing harmonic color and modulating. You never quite know where you are, if you're listening.

Daniel Morel: And that's an interesting pivot. In the course of this conversation and other writings you've talked about this use of openness and spaciousness before, and just listening to your later works, I get the feeling that, that becomes a big part of it.



Robert Carl: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, sure.

Daniel Morel: I'm curious, in those issues of say, temporality or multiplicity, do you see those as an extension or related to historical concerns? Or something that may just be a separate aspect to your music, in itself?

Robert Carl: Yeah, I do think that it's definitely ... the connective tissue is time. First of all, my interest in history was obviously tied to an interest in time, right?

Daniel Morel: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Carl: Past time, coexistent time. When I was, earlier on, I did write whole series of works where, even though I didn't have anything at that point to do with the harmonic practice, they did have formal structures with the way the materials were recycled and so forth, that were rather cyclic in nature. And indeed, I had an omnibus title for them, as a series, called Time is a Sphere.

The idea being, a kind of image that all of time is like a sphere and where ever you are, you are one point on the globe, but all other points are already there. The you that is here, is there's also the you that was there, there.

Daniel Morel: Yes, setting up a relationship of sorts, between all of the those.

Robert Carl: Yeah. There's actually a lot of this sort of stuff in physics, in advanced physics for ways of trying to describe the universe, which I didn't even know at the time. I was just like, "Wow, time is a sphere."

Daniel Morel: And now there are books on the multiverse.

Robert Carl: Exactly. Yeah.

Daniel Morel: Yeah.

Robert Carl: So, anyway, I think the idea of the past being in the present, the past exists in the present, the past is present in the present. The present is present in the future, et cetera, that type of thing. I think that was something about history that was important to me, that drew me to it.

And that did naturally draw me to music, because music is a time arc, which is all about the play of memory.

Robert Carl:

The way that we listen to a piece of longer than three minutes, if it's not pop song form, you have to cultivate the capacity to remember enough so that you can compare, and tell when things return, or if they return in altered form. How they're altered. What the correspondences are between [inaudible 00:38:22]. How are things transformed. All of that takes on hopefully some sort of meaning.

And there are messages in a piece that are being sent from further ahead, back and visa versa. There are premonitions and reminiscences, that are in interplay in any piece of music, all the way through. And so, that aspect of time, was something that was always of interest to me, even in the pieces that were more quote, unquote, historical. I think that still remains in my music.

The one thing I will say is that more and more, time and space feel symbiotic or equivalent to me. So that, a piece of music that is ... an event that happens in music occupies a certain amount of time. The proportion between those, the durations of those events starts to set up a rhythm.

And I think the sense of space that allows an event to have its proper resonance, I might call it, is really important to what makes a piece of music distinctive to me. I have one student who is very bright undergrad, who is a double major with MPT, Music Production Technology, for Mister Recorder over there, though you probably knew that already. We've ended up talking about space in music, for like the whole time. It's been very productive. And we've looked at a lot of pieces closely, by the way.

But one of the things that came up in our conversation that I never quite articulated this way before, but this makes a lot of sense to me, is that as you move further on in Western music, by the time you get to the common practice, music becomes more and more about narrative. Now, I mean, I've always sort of known this, music becomes stories. The sonata form is a story. You go on a trip. You hit a bumpy road. And then you come back home.

Daniel Morel:

Then you come home, yeah.

Robert Carl: But someone's broken in, it's not quite the same as it was. It's sort of like that. There's that sonata allegro [inaudible 00:40:40] right?

Robert Carl: But there are stories and dramas, there are narratives. And of course tone poem is above all. But the symphony is ... the 19th century, the bourgeois audience member who went to hear a Tchaikovsky or a Brahms symphony, went there and could listen to it and could imagine it as their personal story. They become their soundtrack, that they would enter into and it would be their heroic soundtrack really. Tragic, heroic, whatever.

The one thing about this, which is okay, by the way, I'm not putting it down. But one of the things, as narrative becomes more and more dominant in music, it leaves less and less room for space.

Daniel Morel: Time is moving in one direction.

Robert Carl: Yeah. And a lot of the music of the 20th century and now the 21st century, is about sound as objects that you can contemplate. Now, I'm still one who likes ... believe me, I like teleology, don't get me wrong. I'm not all for ... but you know what I mean, it's not just a matter of it having to have had big silences either, right?

You can have music that's incredibly dramatic violent, and dramatic and violent and less teleological, like Xenakis, for instance. But there's still actually an enormous sense of space in that music. It's just that the sense of space is huge enough to actually incorporate these gigantic events. But you can actually sort of imagine these events happening in this gigantic cavern or whatever. That is the field of the piece, the time field of it, the time and sound field of it.

And so, I think that over time, time has moved less from being a kind of symbolic thing, which comes out of the study of history into being more, again, more of an essential thing. Which is, increasingly closely tied to sound and harmony and in a way that ... well, I can show you charts and all sorts of stuff like that, in a way, to continue to talk about it, does it a dis-service. It has to be ... if it's going happen, it has to happen in the music. And you have to judge whether the music ultimately works.

Daniel Morel: Serves that purpose.

Robert Carl: Serves the purpose or not, whether it works or not. Whether it does create a certain sense of space and spaciousness.

Daniel Morel: Do you think that those issues of linearity in a piece are changed when dealing with electronic music? You talk a lot about the MaxMSP installations that you work with. Do you feel that gives you some freedom or some flexibility in approaching independent sound objects that are divorced of memory or association?

Robert Carl: Yeah. I mean, in a way, I can't fully say, because I'm just exploring right now. I think that the sort of what I would call, sonorous timbral fluidity of the electro-acoustic world, where you exist ... where music and sound events exist on many different spectra. And here, I'm not talking about just spectra harmonic, but I mean spectra of colors, spectra of harmony, spectra of density, spectra of silence versus non-silence, all of these things. All these different scales can exist and can be moved and morphed through, very fluently.

And you have more and more control over it, as well, in the electro-acoustic domain. And it's one of those things where, gosh, you know, already, when I deal with a former student like Matt Sargent, I already feel like I'm already so far behind the curve, I can never catch up. It's okay. I feel I have something to offer still.

It's one of those things where I do see the form and the music advancing in such a way, that it will be ... there's always something new that can come up. One of my students yesterday, brought in ... he's a doctoral student, he's very, very bright. He's working on a big piece and he's basically now gotten to the point where he is just copying and editing and it has an MaxMSP and Jitter also in it. And he's refining the patches. So, there's not that much ... it's all written basically. There's not that much for us to talk about.

But I said, "We can talk about anything." So, he said, "Okay. So I brought in a piece. I want you to listen to it and I want you to tell me about how you listened to it and what you think of this piece. And describe your critical thoughts and process of how you evaluate and assimilate it.", et cetera, like that. "Great."

I'm happy to say, it was composed, but I didn't know the piece, it was a composer I had encountered, largely because of Matt Sargent. It's Fausto Romitelli. Italian composer, worked at IRCAM, died the very beginning of 21st century, at age 41 from cancer, so, tragic young

death. And he has a piece, which is a sort of opera called, Index of Metals, which is like a media opera. It's really brilliant music. And it's sort of like, this piece was called Professor Bad Trip, in Three Lessons.

Robert Carl: And it is psychedelic, and it's for ... it's on YouTube. You can look it up. And it's for an ensemble with electro-acoustic processing. You've never heard anything like it.

Daniel Morel: Okay. I'm sorry. What's his name again?

Robert Carl: Fausto Romitelli. He's one of these sort of post-spectralists, I will say, we have now, who are working the spectrum, in many, many ways. And it's a spectrum of noise. It's the spectrum of unpitched sound. It's the spectrum of synthesized versus acoustic sound. And processed sound in between, yadda, yadda.

It's for a mixed ensemble, but you could listen to the piece and you could easily assume that it was a fixed media work. It's amazing to hear. It's actually a performance piece, concert piece.

Daniel Morel: Interesting.

Robert Carl: But anyway, that had something to do with the idea of different ... different-

Daniel Morel: Different spectra of-

Robert Carl: Activity.

Daniel Morel: Yeah.

Robert Carl: And concept, that are more and more fluidly realizable and manipulable through the electro-acoustic domain.

Daniel Morel: Okay. I just would like to maybe circle back a little more just to cover some of the bases.

Robert Carl: And I don't want you to miss set up, or whatever-

Daniel Morel: Exactly.

Robert Carl: ... that you need to [crosstalk 00:47:38].

Daniel Morel: I don't want to go over too long, but with the later half of our conversation moving areas of spaciousness and temporality and all these multiple spectra as you've discussed them, do you feel any overriding necessity to engage history directly within music? We've kind of been touching on this already, is it merely reflection of the works as it exists now?

Robert Carl: Yeah. Well, in once sense, I don't see ... It's interesting, when you say engage history directly, that actually could mean different things. If it means, do you think that you can change the course of history by writing a piece of music? No. Some people do, but I'm not expecting to. It would be nice if I could. But, no.

And in terms of engaging musical history, stylistically now? No. I don't think I'm interested in that. In my wildest dreams, if I could contribute something that would affect the practice of composition, that would inflect some, the way that composers thought and worked, that would be great. That would be a contribution to musical history.

I do feel ... It's interesting that one thing that I'm sort of debating right now, is that I want to make sure that my music does not become too abstract. Now, I will say that when I look at various pieces, I think there's still a lot that's going on that is very quote, unquote humane.

But I was, one thing is, whenever I teach the Ives course, it reminds me, here's this guy with unbelievable fearsome experimentalism and lots of little experimental pieces that are really algorithmic. They're extraordinary. And yet, at the same time, he can write these things that are a kind of vision of the peaceful kingdom that just makes you want to weep it's so beautiful. And it's about ... it's really almost like the same ideas as Beethoven and the 9th Symphony, all men are brothers. It's this sort of giant hymn of humanity, in conjunction with whatever is the transcendental divine or whatever you want to call it.

Robert Carl: I feel like now and then, I start to get so interested in this or that scheme, that I have in a work, that I don't want to lose that. I don't want to lose that quality that I would call, humanistic.

So, in that sense, the engagement with history as a humane phenomenon, I think is something that I want to do, but it's not manifested that much in concrete gestures or images or quotations. Especially the quotation thing. Now, in retrospect, that's very PoMo [postmodern].

Daniel Morel: Yeah.

Robert Carl: And it's like, I don't feel like we really need to do it as much, anymore. Maybe partly because our access has grown, even in the last couple of decades, of so exponentially to music, that ... Listen, any quotation you want to hear, well just plug it in. You just look it up. Why bother inserting it in a piece unless there's a real, real reason for it.

Daniel Morel: Okay. I think this has been really helpful, because I feel like this is a good way to maybe further transition of [inaudible 00:51:22] to discuss later, what you talk about openness and common practice. Because, especially the Westfield keynote address, I think, touches on those areas. I think this is a good start.

Robert Carl: Yes.

Daniel Morel: So, thank you, so much for this time.

Robert Carl: Oh, you're very welcome. You know, the thing that's related to Westfield, I'm not sure, did I send you my manuscript, which is Survivable Music?

Daniel Morel: No. You gave me the chapters specifically pulling your remarks from the minimalism conference.

Robert Carl: I could try to send you the whole thing, if you're interested?

Daniel Morel: I would love to. I wasn't sure in what shape that was, or if you're showing it.

Robert Carl: Well, you know, it's right now being reviewed by University of Illinois Press.



## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT CARL: FEBRUARY 23, 2018, 8AM AT ROOM 39 RESTAURANT (KANSAS CITY, MO)

#### PART 1

Daniel Morel: Okay. Well, just to timestamp this, this is Daniel Morel. I am here with Robert Carl on February 23rd, 2018. We're at Q39 [Restaurant], and we're here to talk a little bit more about Robert Carl's life and his music.

Robert Carl: Yeah. Okay.

Daniel Morel: I was first hoping to follow up a little bit on some of the biography emails that we have sent back and forth.

Robert Carl: Sure.

Daniel Morel: Mostly, I want to make sure I'm not reading too much into some of what we've been talking about. One of those was your relationship with Charles Ives. I was curious to know how much you were aware of him before coming to Yale, and how much more has he influenced your thoughts on music, or just art in general since being exposed to him.

Robert Carl: Yeah. I had heard recordings of his music while I was still in high school, though I only got interested in classical music, somewhere probably in my ... well, I take that back.

Robert Carl: I had a French teacher my freshman year who was really brilliant, and he did all sorts of amazing things with us. At the end of the year, we had at least one or two weeks, and he said, "Hey, why don't I give you a thumbnail sketch of classical music", which he did from just pulling from his record collection. His name was James Creech, C-R-E-E-C-H. I don't know what has happened to him, but I'm always very grateful.

So, I started listening to recordings. Somewhere along the way, I know I heard *The Three Places in New England*. I bought an LP of it, and I even remember my mother coming into my room, and it was *The Housatonic* at Stockbridge, and I remember her saying, "You know? That's genius." Go mom.

I knew Ives's music, and I think I responded to it. I was already attracted to transcendentalism. I had written a paper that was part of an independent study project. An English teacher, junior year, allowed certain students to take a semester off from the regular curriculum if they would write an extended research paper that looked at three artists from a single period, each in a different medium. I chose J. M. W. Turner, Thoreau, and Mahler.

Daniel Morel: Oh, okay.

Robert Carl: So, there was the start of the transcendentalism. I was primed for Ives when I got to Yale.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: When they had the centennial and I heard so much music, that was what sort of put me over the top.

Daniel Morel: Sure. Okay. That makes sense. That actually pulls me to my follow up with transcendentalism. I was wondering, other than the coincidence of birth, what relationship did you have with those authors, and with those thinkers, pre-Yale and post-Yale?

Robert Carl: Other than reading a fair amount of Thoreau, obviously for this one project, not a lot. I think it was the fact that I had encountered Ives simultaneously, that they just seemed sort of synchronous, so it got me

... Of course, it's a kind of all-American, pragmatic, mysticism, you know?

Robert Carl: I think it appealed to my spiritual instincts, I mean, at that time, but it still does. I think it was just something that was kind of organically growing, but there wasn't anything like ... Actually, Emerson, I came to much later. I didn't read the essays probably until I was actually teaching. The collected essays of Emerson.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: I had read ... He's not really a transcendentalist, but I had read a bunch of Hawthorne, we all read the Scarlet Letter in high school, at least one used to, but I think that ... I think I probably, I'm just thinking back on my LPs, I have the feeling that, still while in high school, I had the Kirkpatrick Concord Sonata, and the Bernstein recording of the Second Symphony.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: I'm pretty sure I had those recordings, at least.

Daniel Morel: When you built your record collection, were you mostly kind of going after the same classics that your father was listening to?

Robert Carl: No, I mean, many, yes, but I think I just sort of took on a kind of completest attitude pretty early on, and built out from it. There was, Mahler, my dad loved, and so I got all of Mahler's symphonies, but on the other hand, he loved Delius, and I've never ... I now appreciate him, but I've never fallen in love with Delius.

Daniel Morel: Sure. Okay.

Robert Carl: I'm thinking ... It was just a sort of thing. Whenever I encountered anything, it'd start out from reading reviews, and Stereo Review. In fact, the first two classical recordings I bought on my own, and this really says something, were the Bach Brandenburgs, and of course, it [inaudible 00:05:46] with Berlin, so it's like super lush, it wasn't authentic at all, and the Carter String Quartets. I think it was numbers one and two on the old Nonesuch recordings, with the composer's quartet. So, it was like right there. It was pretty weird.

Daniel Morel: It's a good, varied selection, for sure.

Robert Carl: It is.

[BRIEF PAUSE, DISCUSSION WITH WAITRESS]

Daniel Morel: Speaking of Carter, of course, these days ... well, I actually don't know how many times you've taught it, but you have your Cage, Carter-

Robert Carl: Yeah. I've done it twice-

Daniel Morel: Class. So, I'm curious about which other American mavericks, if you want to use that term, have interested you or influenced you in any way beyond Ives.

Robert Carl: Yeah. Well, there are two who have really come into prominence, post mortem, Nancarrow and Partch, who are both important to me, but I cannot claim that I was really influenced by them. When I discovered them, they were a certain revelation.

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: I do think, in terms of Partch, one that was very important to me from fairly early on, was and is, Ben Johnston.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: Did you see, by the way, he was elected to the American Academy?

Daniel Morel: I did see that, actually.

Robert Carl: Thank God.

Daniel Morel: Good for him, while he's still around to enjoy it.

Robert Carl: I mean, he's on his last legs, I think, but that's really good that was done.

Daniel Morel: I did see that.

Robert Carl: I regard his music as a truly extraordinary thing, both musically, and in terms of the ground that it breaks for everybody. Anyway, other mavericks, it's interesting, I'd have to think a little bit more. Closer to my generation, not a surprise, John Luther Adams, who is the one peer who I would certainly be more than willing to admit influence, though I also have to say ... I think I may have said this-

Daniel Morel: The coincidence that you two-

Robert Carl: Now and then, I've been working on things and then he'll come out with a piece, and I'll say, "Oh, damn. He beat me, again."

Daniel Morel: He beat you to it.

Robert Carl: Yeah. He beat me to it, again.

Daniel Morel: Well, let's take a break.

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: I'll just pause for now.

Robert Carl: Sure.

## PART 2

Robert Carl: Okay. Picking up again on Mavericks. Not super influential, but one composer who, every time I've encountered his music, I've gone back and said, "Wow. That resonates with me," is Dane Rudhyar. Do you know his work?

Daniel Morel: Not particularly. I know the name.

Robert Carl: Yeah. He's sort of like the American Scriabin. He's of that generation. Also, Ruth Crawford. Such strong, wonderfully constructed and imaginative music. Even though, I think he is an incredible spirit, I've never been as influenced by Lou Harrison, even though I think he's a saint, and it's gorgeous and wonderful music. But it's just never had as much of an impact on me.

Though, certainly, my interest in things East Asian has a connection. But it comes less from the gamelan stuff, with him.

Daniel Morel: Could you talk a little bit about what drew you to East Asian music and the Shakuhachi.

Robert Carl: It was fairly early on, in college, I started hearing recordings of Japanese traditional music. I found myself attracted to the Shakuhachi, because of the remarkable negative space in the sound in the silence. That one tone, one line notes. So, it's like a Sumi ink painting on very white paper. The Buddhist chant that is called Shomyo, which is S-H-O-M-Y-O. Obviously, this is all in Romaji, which is very low, powerful, austere, continuous. But above all, Gagaku. I think Gagaku is a real revelation when I encountered it. It was sort of like, "A-ha!" In a way, that's the ideal orchestral music.

Daniel Morel: Sure. And that was all through recording?

Robert Carl: Yeah. I didn't hear Gagaku live until I got to Tokyo. It was one of the reasons I wanted to go.

Daniel Morel: Absolutely.

Robert Carl: I heard it twice. One time, it was the court musicians. The other time, it was basically, I was told, an amateur orchestra, like a club. But they were awfully good. They may have taken it as seriously, or more so, than the pros.

Daniel Morel: Sure. Well, it gives you a good introduction to just hearing the sound. That's amazing. Have you tried incorporating any of that sound world into music that doesn't specifically use Shakuhachi or eastern instruments?

Robert Carl: I do think ... This is something that's been told to me, though it's like, not seeing your own face in the mirror. But, actually, silence is an important part of, I think, a lot of my work. And certainly, whether it's articulated in silence or not, a sense of musical space, which I think is something that Japanese music, in particular, has. It has the capacity and the patience to let the sound resonate: to let sounds have their own life and not to force them or not to hurry them. When that is combined with a compelling structure, as in Gagaku, I think you have a great mix.

Especially the farther along we get toward the present, there's more and more instances in my music of where there will be ... meaningful silences occur. And actually, one other thing, that is ... Even though it's not specifically East Asian, but that's been in my music for a long time, is glissandos: the idea of the slowly moving line that is counterpoint, but it stretch ... I jokingly call it taffy counterpoint. Voice-wise, it's saltwater taffy voice leading.

Daniel Morel: Are you as interested then in those slow glissandi, more in taking sounds more in the points of starts and conclusion, or in the sounds in between?

Robert Carl: The answer's both.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: The start and endpoints are usually defined by harmonic goals. The world in between ... It's not like I'm hearing every increment along the way, or listening for that. I'm listening as a sound event in itself, and a certain sense of mysterious but inevitable movement toward a goal that is not revealed until you get there.

In my new symphony, which is now in rehearsal, toward the conclusion of the second movement, which is sort of a storm, it's about trying to create your own shelter before you're overwhelmed. It comes out of the current climate, literally and figuratively. At the end, when it's sort of reached a certain climax, then the slow string writing starts, which is very broad counterpoint. You'd find it recognizable if you heard it. But one of the things that I did ... It's more or less, two, maybe max three-part counterpoint. But what I did was, for each line that had a typical kind of arching line, I also had another line that was a shadow that starts and reaches its top point as a glissando, at the same time that the other line, that is a melodic line, reaches it.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: So that you have this constant shadowing going on, which really makes it sound like, very much, multi-part counterpoint, even when it's not. Which was, in fact, something slightly new that I have done, that I figured out. I think that the glissando thing is a big deal.

Daniel Morel: The evolution of your harmonic language, has that been mostly through your larger orchestral works, or have you been working this out through your chamber pieces and throughout your output?

Robert Carl: I have. By the way, when I say this, this is in no way to put any pressure on you, but today, are you free to come to the show that I'm doing?

Daniel Morel: I have to check in and make sure that things have that ... I'm going to try and be there.

Robert Carl: I wasn't expecting it. The only reason I say it is that I think it would probably answer a bunch of your questions, because I'm talking about, not just the piece that I'm doing at KCAI, but sort of leading up to it, in terms of practice.

Daniel Morel: Okay. That was ... Some of my questions for today were along that line: the harmonic ladders you talked about, [the piece] Changing My Spots.

Robert Carl: I can still talk about it.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: I'm not trying to put that off. If you come, it's three to four, and then four to five, I'm doing a master class.

Daniel Morel: Okay. That will be perfect then, actually. I think that should be no problem at all.



Robert Carl: But, the answer is yes. As a matter of fact, the first piece where I hit on this was a little trio for a German ensemble that I met, which was piano, oboe and cello. The title of the piece is "Coloring Sounds Scent." That's scent, like smell. It basically posited a series of vertical overtone series, then fit them as approximately as possible into just intonation. And then, would modulate between them by picking common partials and starting to emphasize them, as a way of getting from here to there.

Daniel Morel: So, as pivots between different series.

Robert Carl: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That is the bullet point description of the practice. With "Changing My Spots," I actually rationalized it into a series of ladders, that themselves, their fundamentals are pulled off of the overtone series of the first ladder. The lowest one. And then cover, basically, the entire range of orchestral sound.

Daniel Morel: Okay. Have you ever diagrammed this idea of ladders?

Robert Carl: Yeah. The score of "Changing My Spots" is honestly the thing that does it, that I will go back to periodically, but I always try to find some way to work it differently as a technique. And there's one other little piece too that's a sort of foundational piece. It's called "From the Ground Up," and it's for solo piano, though there was a version done later on, just as a kind of ... It was a request for the wind ensemble, and I orchestrated it for that. But the piano version is really the one that's more useful, because in that one, I have a little chant-like line that's going in the middle of three staves, and then, at different points, I take a particular note within that and just interpret it as particular partial within a new ladder, that then surrounds it above and below with accompaniment.

But that was also a little more ... It still hadn't been globalized. I guess "Changing My Spots" is the one that works it out for the first time, more globally.

Daniel Morel: Okay. The system, when you incorporate it into your other pieces, symphonic or chamber, do you apply it to other images or ideas that you already have for the music, or are you ... Does the harmony fit the form, or the form fit the harmony, I guess, is maybe what I'm trying to ask.

Robert Carl: Overall, I think that the two should be seamless. I try to get to a thing where, if I have a motivating image for the piece, the structure of the harmonic template and its evolution is representative of what the image is. Or, if I start off with the harmonic thing, I'll start to cultivate an image, which becomes a stimulating one.

But, there is ... Most of my pieces still have some sort of "extra musical" quality. But, I also feel that they've gotten, hopefully, more essentially musical along the way. When I look back, the music that I wrote up to about the turn of the century, was more classically postmodern. There was a lot of historical reference, there was a lot of play with juxtaposition of styles, quotations, elements, things like that. There was also a lot of just doing things to try to learn technique. An awful lot of that was self-education for a late starter.

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: But, once I got to this point, where I am now, I felt like I really was conceiving something that was more my own music, though mind you, nothing we write is absolutely our own, right? But it was more mine and it had less need of external reference. Especially musical reference and historical reference.

Daniel Morel: Do you still find need, value, or whatever might be the best word, for external reference, in terms of imagistic descriptions or scenes that you're painting within the music?

Robert Carl: I think so. I mean, even this new symphony. It's really sort of about the construction of a shelter in three movements. The first movement is sort of like ... I also thought of it as being both natural and architectural. The first one is ... No. Wait, I'm going to forget what my titles are. I think it's Foundations Succeed, Foundation ... The next one is Trunk Limbs ... I don't know. Structures. Columns, maybe. I think it's trunk, columns, limbs, something else, and then the final one is Canopy Dome.

It's the idea of building something that is both a tree and a physical, architectural shelter. So that's a motivating image. That doesn't have a lot to do with the specific technique being used, but it is a stimulus.

Daniel Morel: A basis?

Robert Carl: Yeah.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: An expressive stimulus.

Daniel Morel: That makes sense. Again, just thinking about this idea of harmonic ladders and structures, do the harmonic ladders that you're working with, do you see that in a sculptural sense as well?

Robert Carl: Interesting. Not exactly. But I definitely do feel that they're in space. I do think of them as kind of dimensional. Even though I've never used it after I understood the principle of it, in my encounter with Xenakis, with group theory, was a true liberation of my thinking about form, because he would talk about ... I'm not sure if I had mentioned this before or not, but he would talk about a symmetric solid, almost like a geometric solid, like a cube, where each corner was labeled with two variables. One of which was fixed in space, always there, but when you rotated it on an axis, a new thing would come to occupy that spot. That spot was the other variable. So, you would have, by twirling the cube on different axes, you would get a record of a constant set of changing variables on the spot. And that could then be applied to anything you wanted in the piece.

That was a total liberation, because it kept it in time, but it took it out of narration.

Daniel Morel: Sure. Did you immediately try applying that new concept of form, or was that something you mulled around a bit, for playing with it?

Robert Carl: I did. I wrote a whole bunch of pieces, maybe 13 or so, that, if you look at the scores, they have at the bottom of it, this subscript that says, "Time is a sphere, Number X." So, even though they didn't have anything to do with the harmonic system yet, I was trying to find ways of having evolution. The first piece I did with that was called "Garland," where I wrote the piece ... I created a circle. I can't remember exactly how the points on the circle were used to generate the music, but it was a solo cello piece, but then it takes itself, it cuts itself in half and it didn't play simultaneously like this, with two parts.

Carl, at this point, makes a circle and moves around the two fingers.

Daniel Morel: Flipping the two sides. Okay. That makes a lot of sense. And with all of the electronic work that you're doing these days, your work with electronic music, has that helped fine-tune, so to speak, the harmonic systems that you like to work with?

Robert Carl: Absolutely. Well, one of the other things that has happened, that is not ... I don't regard it as the next thing that eradicates everything else, but I have started to find ways that I can use natural harmonics, real just intonation, in order to get the actual tunings that are behind the ladders.

I have two pieces that do this in different ways. One, and you'll hear a little bit of it today, is my third piano sonata, which is called "Clouds of Clarification." And you may say, "Now, wait a minute, you're talking about just intonation, you're talking about the ladders and changing fundamentals and you're talking about a piano sonata. What's going on?" Okay. There is a quite amazing musician out in L.A. whose name is Aron Kallay, K-A-L-L-A-Y. It's A-R-O-N. He's made it his mission to create a new body of micro-tonal keyboard rep. He has a keyboard, a digital keyboard, and he has it tied up to a software called PianoTech, which allows you to create any tuning of any sort, and to change instantaneously from one to the other. And the sound are piano resynthesis, so they're quite good.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: It's not quite, yet, a Steinway D Grand, but it's awfully good. So, I wrote it for him, for that. It works with six ladders, and the way he has devised, he has, on top of the keyboard, a little, tiny controller keyboard that uses a MAX/MSP P\patch, just by touching a key, to switch the tunings.

He's premiered it in L.A. and he's finished the recording, which is going to come out in a few months on MicroFest Records.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: So, that's an instance of technology ... Oh my god, Secret Agent. But, is Johnny Rivers' voice going to come in?

[“SECRET AGENT MAN” IS PLAYING ON THE RESTAURANT SOUND SYSTEM]

Daniel Morel: I think this is just quoting the-

Robert Carl: Yeah, it is.

Daniel Morel: It's just quoting it.

Robert Carl: It's a cover. So, anyway, sorry I got distracted there by something trivial. The other one is Infinity Avenue.

Daniel Morel: Okay, which is being done here on Tuesday.

Robert Carl: Right. For this one, I have a MAX/MSP patch that generates. I can either play it manually, from the keyboard, or literally from the laptop keyboard, triggering pitches, or I can set ladders into a sort of constant, automatic cycling. And then, there's a nice option called URN that has you go through all the items in an ostinato, in a random order, but will not repeat any until it's done all of those in it.

Daniel Morel: Fantastic.

Robert Carl: So, it's perfectly serial.

Daniel Morel: In a minimalist fashion.

Robert Carl: Yeah. And you know, one of the things that I feel like, though I've never written a 12-tone piece, I feel like all these pieces, in some ways, are all about vertical, 12-tone relations, but in just intonation. They don't have anything to do with order, but they do have to do with a certain sort of dodecaphony.

Daniel Morel: Presenting them as a body of sound of vertical sonority.

Robert Carl: Right, yeah.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: At least in the structure thereof. And of course, this piece is still improvisatory. I've sort of taken an approach that, in this piece, I'm using it as way of teaching myself what the potential of this system is. I do want to write an either large ensemble or orchestral piece that is derived from it, that may still have some aspects of open form to it, but that will be much more fixed. But, I don't feel I can do it until I've really gotten through this version of the piece.

I had one where I performed it as a sort of open-form laptop piece, and then as an installation, where it can go for hours. I've done both of those.

Daniel Morel: Do you see that this is working through the theory of it still, or more just the practicality?

Robert Carl: Seeing possibilities in the theory. Again, it's a combination of it. It is developing a practice.

Daniel Morel: Well, I'm glad that we can talk a little bit more about the harmonics ... harmony that goes into the music.

Robert Carl: I would say that, what I'll show for that hour should, especially with what I've said, maybe it will be redundant, I don't know ... But it should hammer it in. I'm playing a piece ... One thing is that, I don't feel that what I'm doing is now displacing all of my stuff that uses equal temperament. Because that just shuts down so many possibilities I want to explore.

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: I couldn't write this symphony. But it's one of those things where ... I have to say, it's really sort of amazing that you just voice things in the right registration, how quickly it starts to sound like it's all not in just intonation. It sounds ... No, it doesn't. It's close enough to rock and roll. That's all I'll say. It's evocative enough of it. For me.

Daniel Morel: It gets you to where you're going.

Robert Carl: Other people would regard it as a horrible compromise and profanation. I'm serious. I'm always willing to be accused of being a traitor or something like that. The good news is that, I've come so late

to it, usually people who are die hards, I think, will say, "Oh, look. Well, at least he's doing something with it." So that they're willing to cut me more slack.

Daniel Morel: So, moving between equal temperament and just intonation and moving between acoustical sound and electronic sound, do you ... You may have even thought about this before, but I'm curious, how concerned are you about the life of your music as technology evolves, or as temperaments may change?

Robert Carl: The answer is sure, to some degree. Of course, temperaments can always be ... If you just have the right data, it can always be recreated. For all these pieces, there are extensive tuning charts that show exactly what's on it. When I'm accessing this MSP patch, all I can say is that the program has been around for a while. It has such a devoted following that is anyone wants to analyze whatever I've made and recreate it or update it or whatever, I think it'll be pretty possible.

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: I have an attitude, which, by the way, Louis Vivir was the first person that said this to me and I really appreciated, that with technology, you need to just assume that we are living in the baroque and rococo. That the instruments are constantly rising up and falling away, and that we are just going to have to stay adaptable. On the whole, as much as possible, my approach to the technology is make it open-ended enough that you can use whatever is available.

Sorry ...

Daniel Morel: We were just ... Technology.

Robert Carl: For instance, I have a synthesizer part in the third movement of my symphony, which is actually quite important, but it is only just a slowly growing, six-pitch chord, in a high register, which is supposed to be a kind of glassy, sine-toned sound. That's going to be a little bit different from one performance to another, but I feel like, yeah.

Daniel Morel: It is what it is.

Robert Carl: Exactly.

Daniel Morel: Okay.

Robert Carl: It usually works just fine. There's another piece, actually, called "Open Empty" for [inaudible 00:28:50] ensemble, and the piano part has a similar usage at the beginning, of the synthesizer. You can hear it, it's on YouTube. You can hear it if you want.

Daniel Morel: Sure, I'll have to check that out. I think I've exhausted all my questions on harmony for the moment, but I did want to jump back to something else you were talking about: postmodernism. I kind of chuckled, in one of your emails you sent, you talked about, "postmodernism has come and gone, but we're still living with the consequences of it." I was curious, what is your relationship with postmodernism?

Robert Carl: When I say the consequences, I don't mean that in a negative way, it's just the result. The postmodernism, as a style, I feel was pretty much over by the end of the 20th century. That is a style, which used pastiche, historical reference, radical juxtapositions, contrasts of "high and low," a refusal, necessarily, to have an organic or a linear approach to a work of art, a healthy dollop or irony. All of those things.

Of course, this is something that Jonathan outlines beautifully in his book. He gets it. Jonathan really felt that this was a style that he believed in. He saw himself as postmodernist composer the same way that one would see oneself as a serial composer. I think that these markers, of a style, because ... [inaudible 00:30:41] necessary to shake things up, for me, were inherently too superficial to justify a long life.

But, what they had pointed out in terms of potential, and the types of musics that were made then, I think, were incredibly liberating. And now, composers feel very uninhibited about the way that they blend and synthesize radically different and seemingly, supposedly, irreconcilable elements. That, I think, is the real legacy of postmodernism, which is what my whole Survivable Music thesis is: that it's a common practice, because the practice has gotten so broad, everybody can be in it. That's the idea, by the way, that a lot of people who are more protective of taxonomies just can't stand. It's too inclusive. So, anyway, we'll see.



Daniel Morel: I'm curious, and I've read through some of the manuscript, and of course, your Westfield Eight Waves. When you talk about multiplicity and you talk about openness, do you see them do those waves in a sense, wiping out delineations between style, or just encapsulating everything and allowing it to coexist?

Robert Carl: I do think that style as a ... I do think that style as an exclusive thing is ... Let's put it this way, it's less powerful than it used to be. I think a lot of these things are erasing a lot of the boundaries that other people felt existed and were protective of. At the same time, the last thing I want is for this broader plane to erase the possibility of someone to have the great monomaniacal motivation and idea that leads to really interesting, creative work.

Someone like Nancarrow, for instance. In one sense, his approach, though even there, I could say that in one sense, here he is doing all of this unbelievable rhythmic experimentation. But, not only very little concern for pitch, but most of what the music is based on is like boogie woogie. It's sort of like Texarkana Roadhouse meets the most sophisticated experimental, rhythmic music in history. That's kind of weird. That's kind of postmodern, in the way I'm defining it, in its own way.

Of course, this is a theory that you could push ... I'm very good at making these arguments, though. When questions come, I'm pretty good at hitting back the lobs. I'm doing it with myself right now. But, nevertheless, I really do appreciate the idea of the obsessive roots of certain sorts of great creation, and I don't want to be denying it at all.

Daniel Morel: Sure. Okay. That makes perfect sense. I'm glad that we're circling around to form and style, or style specifically, because this was something else that I found very interesting in what you had highlighted in some of your studies and biographies. I really geeked out about the fact that you spent so much time with [Leonard] Meyer, [Rose] Subotnik, and [Robert] Morgan. I'm curious. Do you feel it's given you a different vantage point of being so acutely aware of style in a critical sense, versus other composers?

Robert Carl: Yes. Interesting. Yes. One footnote, I took one seminar with Rose Subotnik at the University of Chicago and I really admire her, but I don't know her work as well. It's not that she couldn't be influential, but actually, I don't think I've ever read her. So, I really shouldn't put her as an influence. On the other hand, Leonard Meyer, I've read most

of his books. He did teach a seminar at Penn, as I said. It was one of his last acts as an academic before he retired. It was pretty much based on the research he was making for his style and music book.

Robert Carl: Meyer and Morgan, both of them ... I think Morgan maybe even studied under Meyer. I'm not sure. He studied with Edward Cone, who is another who I really admire. Okay, so there's a certain sort of theorist musicologist who I really respond to. They are very much thinkers about music. They're very uninhibited and catholic in their intellectual pursuits and types of connections they try to make. They're willing to take risks. They're also very practical, in that they really try to write about what they're hearing and trying to understand why they're hearing it that way. Besides that, they actually can write well. All of those things make Cone, Morgan, Meyer, I would say also Joseph Kerman, really important to me.

By the way, there's several generations afterwards. Even though I have a couple of slight, theory, musicological credits to my name, I'm an imposter in the field, so I don't know really who is who. I remember for [the manuscript for] *Survivable Music*, and one of the comments that came back was, "But doesn't he know this book by so and so? He doesn't know this book by so and so." No. Only so many lives to lead. But anyway.

Going back to this, I love the fact that, for instance, Meyer really talked a lot about the way that composers intuit and realize strategies in their music. [grabs a bill on the table] I'll take this one.

Daniel Morel: Thank you.

Robert Carl: Can you take me to the airport on Wednesday?

Daniel Morel: Yes, absolutely.

Robert Carl: We could maybe have breakfast if we time it right.

Daniel Morel: If there's time, yeah.

Robert Carl: We might split that one.

Daniel Morel: That's perfect. But this is on me.

Robert Carl: Okay, thank you.

Robert Carl: So, anyway, sorry. All that got onto the tape.

Daniel Morel: That's quite alright. This is a very informal conversation.

Robert Carl: Meyer was talking about the way that composers may create strategies, envision them, and then realize them. I remember, he did one analysis of the Chopin prelude, which the number I've forgotten, but it's [humming 00:38:26]. It's basically a long, descending line, and there's an interruption in it. What he did is, he said that if you kept the process going, of the descent, when it returns, it actually returns at the same point in pitch level that it would if it had gone straight, but that the interruption is there so that the other piece is still going in the background. Invisibly, in a sense, or inaudibly, in your mind. Invisibly, really. It's invisible audio, I guess is what you would call it, rather than inaudible.

That sort of thinking, I think, is just so cool. He simultaneously was always interested in the way that all of this interacted with culture. He wasn't trying to pull it away from history and culture. He saw that all as a ... What's the word I'm looking for? You can't untie it.

Daniel Morel: Intertwined?

Robert Carl: Yeah. It was all totally intertwined, and should be considered as such. Which means, also, a willingness to admit that there are not definitive answers or definitions for many, many things. That all you can do is look at it from this angle, from this angle, from this angle, and as you put the angles together, you can start to construct a sense of an understanding or a work.

Bob Morgan, very much the same. Really wonderfully tactical but creative thinking about music. So smart about Ives and Mahler, in particular, who were two of my favorite composers. I did take seminars from him on both Schoenberg and Stravinsky while I was at two different seminars at U of C. Which are great, and sort of gave the model for the types of courses that I've done when I've done seminars. Like, the three C's, my Ives seminar. I did one ... I'm not sure if I told

you this or not, but I did one in the fall, which was minimalism and postmodernism.

Daniel Morel: Oh, okay.

Robert Carl: Which is an impossible topic, I know, but actually, I will say, I think I pulled it off. Let's put it this way: it's a dirty job, but no one else at heart is going to do it. I didn't have any guff about it, but I think it was not hopelessly superficial. Put it that way.

Also, these were all things where I want to learn something. So I'm willing to do the prep scut work, because it's very useful for me, in terms of what I get out of it from my own viewpoint. Standpoint.

Daniel Morel: Do you feel, the more you are looking into music from ... Not your own music, but other music, from a cultural perspective or outside perspective, that it does inform your music?

Robert Carl: I think so. I'll tell you ... Very concrete was the study that I put in, this time, to the minimalism aspect of that course. Looking really closely at a bunch of ... especially Reich and Glass pieces. It didn't make me really like Phil Glass anymore than I do, but it really did make me appreciate what was really original about the music.

And also, by the way, the courage that it had: what he gave up in order to do that. But that's not what I was really going at, technically. There are a whole bunch of things, and it's not that it hadn't happened before. It happened when I wrote the Riley book. Coming to an understanding of how you can let a piece of music go on as long as it needs to go, and if you can convey the necessity of that link, everybody's going to accept. Or at least, lots of people are going to accept it. Not in the beginning, I know.

So things like that, and a willingness to allow myself to let repetition happen when it needs to happen. The piece I've started writing right now, and I feel like I'm almost in a semi-blank slate, which is I'm going to ... When I did this little dog and pony show that I did today, I did it up at Tufts a couple years ago. At one point, one of the students said, "Mr. Carl, this is really interesting. That's all well and good, what you're talking about with harmony, but do you have a theory of rhythm?"

Robert Carl: I do have an answer to that, which is it's not on the micro level, it's on a macro level, in that the proportions of sections themselves are often derived from the ratios of fundamentals that would define the different ... So that I can work out a pacing of the transitions in the piece, on the overall, which has a certain shape and form, and has a macro rhythm.

But, at the same time, the rhythms within it from moment to moment are very intuitive. Of course, that's fine. Maybe it's good that they stay intuitive, but I also said, "You know, I really haven't thought about that, and I really need to think about it more." So, I've worked out an experiment ...

[BRIEF PAUSE AND CONVERSATION WITH KAREN MCCOY AND CALEB BOWMAN VISITING THE RESTAURANT]

Robert Carl: I'll just sort of finish up with this one. This piece. I've worked out, now, a whole set of ... It's taken a while, but a sort of set of criteria for rhythmic events that are analogous to what happens with the harmonic system. I'm writing it for 12 strings, though the idea's also that it could be done as a [inaudible 00:45:40] piece, because we also have that now, at heart.

Thought it'll be more ... Or really, I can't help but do all sorts of things that are string-specific in it. No glissandos yet, but I'm sure there will be. But it'll be in six short movements that, very much, are more reductionist in their harmonic approach, maybe, than some of my other pieces. Where it's really, the rhythm is the focus. By the way, the title is "A Theory of Rhythm-Via Dance," because they're all meant to be different forms of dance. I'm working on the hyper shuffle right now.

But that ... In a way, the willingness to write a piece like that, I think, comes from the example of someone like Steve Reich, who said, "I'm so sick of what I'm doing. I'm just going to write a piece for pieces of wood," or "I'm going to write a piece, which is the phasing of one line," et cetera. Like that.

Daniel Morel: Sure.

Robert Carl: That willingness to clear the decks. Clean the slate.

Daniel Morel: Okay. I will turn this off for now.

Robert Carl:        Yeah.

Daniel Morel:        We've got plenty to go with.

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## VITA

Daniel Morel is a Kansas City-based composer who energizes his music with spectral lyricism. Garnering commissions and performances across the United States, his music reflects myriad literary and natural interests. His works are permeated with the Western sensibilities of his Colorado upbringing, drawing on influences ranging from prairie thunderstorms to classic American poetry.

Mr. Morel has received awards and honors from the Mizzou New Music Initiative, Byrdcliffe Guild, the City of Hartford, the Hartt School, the Longfellow Chorus, and the Colorado State Music Teacher's Association, among others. Recent premieres include the Cherry Creek Chorale, Hartford Opera Theater, and Seasons Festival Orchestra.

Mr. Morel holds degrees from Bucknell University (BA) and The Hartt School, University of Hartford (MM, AD). He is currently working on a doctorate at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Performance details and further information are available at [www.danmorel.com](http://www.danmorel.com).