

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this Project is twofold: first, to explore and potentially help revive the music of the twentieth-century American composer Peter Mennin (1923-1983), and second, to create a new symphony for performance by a high school, a junior college, or a community orchestra in Mennin's style. Mennin uses modern composition techniques but stays away from experimental or less accessible ones, such as serialism, indeterminacy, or avant-gardism. His music is challenging yet not harmonically or rhythmically intimidating. A newly composed work in this style would be quite attractive to, for example, a community orchestra that wants to perform current music but not be disengaging to their particular performers or audience.

Chapter Two of this project contains a biography of Mennin and, through the study of his symphonies, an investigation of his general symphonic technique and evolution.

Mennin's style is remarkable for its chronological development along a powerful...continuum. This evolution was so even and continuous that it is fairly easy to date one of Mennin's compositions after listening to it for just a few minutes.¹

Chapter Three includes a full analysis of Mennin's Symphony No. 5 to examine its

¹ Walter G. Simmons, notes to Peter Mennin, *Symphonies Nos. 3 & 7; Piano Concerto* (1997), CD, CRI CD741.

components in detail: its use of rhythm, orchestration, harmony, formal structure, and thematic material. Mennin's treatment of these elements was emulated in an original symphony, Shaw's Symphony No. 1, which is similarly analyzed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains the overall summary and conclusions, and the appendices include supporting materials, as well as the score to Shaw's Symphony No. 1.

The choice of Symphony No. 5 as a model for an original symphony is because it represents Mennin's "accessible" style in his middle period, before his works became more complex and chromatic.

Over the years, the linear aspect of Mennin's music became increasingly dissonant, and the rhythm increasingly irregular. His body of work thus stands as an inexorable progression, each entry grimmer, harsher, and more severe than the last.²

This early style is more preferable to those who may not have a high tolerance for dissonance or experimental sounds.

Statement of the Problem

For years, Peter Mennin has been a relatively disregarded twentieth-century American composer. Although he received numerous awards for his compositions and appointments to prestigious academic posts, contemporary study of his works is rare. Most magazine and journal articles written about his music are quite dated.

There has never been a thorough study on any of Mennin's purely orchestral symphonies. There are but three doctoral dissertations about his music, two of which are

² Walter G. Simmons, *Review of Mennin: Symphonies: No. 3; No. 7. Concertato, "Moby Dick" Delos De-3164* [Web Page] (Originally from Fanfare Magazine, 1997, accessed 3 March 2003); available from <http://www.walter-simmons.com/articles/11.htm>.

on his vocal works³ and one that is on his piano pieces.⁴ There are only four master's theses⁵ and one book⁶ on his music, none of which are on his symphonies.

This is intriguing since writing symphonies was Mennin's main interest: "I like a big canvas. Composers today often prefer to work on a small scale, but I need lots of instrumental room."⁷ They are also what gained him the most attention from critics, such as Paul Snook of *Fanfare* magazine, who wrote: "He was the youngest and to date the last composer to make a personal and significant contribution to the short-lived but imposing tradition of the modern American symphony."⁸ David Hall wrote in *Stereo Review*: "Mennin...was one of American music's major symphonists...The best of his nine works in that form rank with the best of Roy Harris, William Schuman, and...David Diamond."⁹ Author Joseph Machlis also wrote: "Among the composers of his generation

³ Mary Jane Bowles Ayers, "The Major Choral Works of Peter Mennin." (DMA, University of Miami, 1982). Mary Ruth Schneyer Rhoads, "Influences of Japanese *Hogaku* Manifest in Selected Compositions by Peter Mennin and Benjamin Britten" (Ph.D., Music Theory, Michigan State University, 1969).

⁴ Wayne Richard Pierce, "An Orchestral Transcription of Peter Mennin's Five Piano Pieces Based on a Study of His Early Works for Orchestra. (1942-1953)" (D.M.A., University of Connecticut, 1999).

⁵ Judson Frank Bracey, "The Canzoni of Peter Mennin : A Comparative Analysis with Reference to the Form of the Historical Canzona" (M.M., Ohio University, 1977), Earl E. Kelly, "The Piano Music of Peter Mennin" (M.M., Kent State University, 1964), Carl Schalk, "A Stylistic Analysis of the Christmas Story for Orchestra and Mixed Chorus by Peter Mennin" (M.M., University of Rochester, 1957), Gary Lee Zeller, "The Handling of Certain Metrical Devices in Selected String Quartet Music of Twentieth-Century American Composers" (M.M., University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 1965).

⁶ Richard D. Mountford, *Canzona by Peter Mennin; an Analysis for Instruction and Performance* (1972).

⁷ Dorle J. Soria, "Artist Life," *High Fidelity/Musical America* v. 18 (November 1968): MA-6.

⁸ Paul Snook, "Review: Mennin: Symphony No. 6; Riegger: Variations for Piano and Orchestra; Toch: Notturmo," *Fanfare* v. i/6 (1978): 126.

⁹ David Hall, "Review: Symphonies: No. 3; No. 7. Concertato, "Moby Dick"," *Stereo Review*, May 1997, 99.

Peter Mennin must be accounted one of the most successful practitioners of the grand form.”¹⁰ Furthermore, critic Walter Simmons not only views Mennin as “America’s greatest symphonist,” but also in general as “one of America’s most eloquent, powerful, and individual compositional voices.”¹¹

Justification of the Study

The United States lacks a long musical history and correspondingly lacks a strong tradition of domestic composers. It stands to reason that the works of seemingly significant, though neglected, American composers should be studied and, perhaps, reintroduced into our repertoire. Peter Mennin is just such a composer. Though at one time lauded, Mennin’s music seems to have perished along with its composer. This is especially puzzling since he had such a successful and productive career.

Numerous institutions commissioned works from Mennin, including: the Association of Women’s Committees for Major Symphony Orchestras, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Cincinnati Musical Festival Association, the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation of the Library of Congress, the Ford Foundation Program for Concert Artists, the Juilliard Music Foundation, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the League of Composers, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Federation of Music Clubs, the Protestant Radio Commission, the Sigma Alpha Iota Music Fraternity, the Collegiate Chorale, the Cleveland Symphony, the Dallas

¹⁰ Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 530.

¹¹ Simmons, *Review of Mennin: Symphonies: No. 3; No. 7. Concertato, "Moby Dick" Delos De-3164*.

Symphony, the Erie Philharmonic, the Louisville Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic.¹²

His composition awards include the Bearns Prize in Composition from Columbia University (Symphony No. 2), the first Gershwin Memorial Prize (Symphony No. 2), the Walter W. Naumburg American Music Recording Award (Symphony No. 3), two Guggenheim Foundation Memorial Awards, the American Academy of Arts and Letters award, the Columbia Records Chamber Music Award (String Quartet No. 2), and the Centennial Citation from the University of Rochester. Furthermore, he received honorary doctorates from Oberlin College, the Peabody Conservatory, Temple University, the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Heidelberg in Germany.

Besides being a successful and celebrated composer, Mennin was also an influential music educator and administrator. He taught composition at the Juilliard School from 1947 to 1958 and was director of the Peabody Conservatory from 1958 to 1962. At Peabody, he founded the Peabody Art Theater and American Conductors Project. Mennin then returned to Juilliard in 1962 as president, where he remained until his death in 1983. While in charge of Juilliard, he directed the school's move to Lincoln Center and established the Juilliard Theater Center, the American Opera Center, the Conductor's Training Program, the Playwrights Program, and the annual Contemporary Music Festival. Mennin was responsible for bringing such talents to the faculty as the composers Elliott Carter, Roger Sessions, and Luciano Berio, and the conductors Sixten

¹² The New York Philharmonic has given 32 performances of Mennin's works, including premieres of his Third and Eighth Symphonies. Bernard Holland, "Peter Mennin, Juilliard President and Prolific Composer, Dies at 60," *New York Times*, 21 June 1983.

Ehrling and Alfred Wallenstein.¹³

Some of Mennin's composition students include the composer and critic, Robert Paris (b. 1924); the Brazilian composer, conductor, and critic, Edino Krieger (b.1928); the composer, flautist and musicologist, Claire Polin (1926-1995); the pianist and musicologist, Liselotte Schmidt; and the composers and educators Jack Behrens (b. 1935), Richard Danielpour (b. 1956), Jacob Druckman (1928-1996), Karl (Richard) Korte (b. 1928), and Michael White.

Finally, because of Mennin's excellence as both a musician and administrator, many organizations sought his guidance. He was on the board of directors of Juilliard, the Lincoln Center Council, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, the American Music Center, and the Composers' Forum. He served as president of the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, president and chair of the National Music Council, and officer and treasurer of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was also on advisory committees for the New York State Council on the Arts, the United States Information Agency, and the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts for the National Cultural Center.

Mennin's impressive administrative and creative careers in music offer proof of the respect that he obtained during his lifetime. He certainly was a proficient composer based on the number of music commissions that he received. With such accomplishments to his name, why are his works neglected?

One reason may be that Mennin was not a compositional innovator. He did not create or experiment with any new procedures, except in his last works which explored

¹³ Ibid.

the “sound mass” technique established by Ligeti and Penderecki. Mennin, however, was not concerned with creating *original* techniques. He states: “ ‘Original’ means you invent something that nobody else has done....What this really means is you can be original and [still] have no talent.”¹⁴ He continues: “I can’t at the moment think of a major composer who was a musical scientist at the same time. Not one. Because those ‘major league boys’ didn’t *invent* anything, they merely wrote great music.”¹⁵

Mennin, instead, created an “individual” voice, as Bach or Brahms had done, by producing a unique sound with conventional means:

Individuality is an inevitable precondition for music of lasting value. Individuality does not mean novelty for its own sake, since novelty, once familiar, becomes a cliché. It does mean a strong musical thrust, unconcerned with convention, or with conformity either to the past or to the fads of the moment. It is concerned with the drive of the composer’s musical ideas; it is having one’s own voice, one’s own face.¹⁶

To further illustrate the difference between originality and individuality, he explains:

“Vicentino [16th c.] went so far as to introduce what might be almost quarter-tone music. That’s very original....But we don’t talk about him as a composer. [On the other hand,]...a major league composer like Bach...was not original, but certainly highly individual.”¹⁷

Mennin was mostly a traditionalist, writing in a logical, ordered style and preferring large-scale, absolute forms. Though his works make extensive use of

¹⁴ Peter Mennin, as quoted in Mark Carrington, ““for the Sake of Art”: A Talk with Peter Mennin.,” *Symphony* v. 34 (1983): 41.

¹⁵ David Owens, “Composer Peter Mennin: An Interview,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 and 30 July 1981.

¹⁶ Peter Mennin, as quoted in “Peter Mennin,” in *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310.

¹⁷ Peter Mennin, as quoted in Carrington, ““for the Sake of Art”: A Talk with Peter Mennin.,” 41.

chromaticism, they mostly still remain either tonal or modal. Mennin did not write serial music; even his later works that use all twelve tones simultaneously have a strong pitch center. In the words of critic Martin Bernheimer, Mennin “savored the distinction between dramatic dissonance and harmonic chaos for its own sake.”¹⁸ Unfortunately though, this style fell out of favor towards the end of his life and may be another reason for the lack of interest in his music.

Mennin’s career as a prominent administrator probably also influenced his legacy: “[His] administrative identity...caused his public persona as an administrator to overshadow his contributions as a composer.”¹⁹ Furthermore, to support his influential and visible position, he led a very conventional lifestyle, composing daily, raising two successful children, and remaining married for over thirty-five years. “His reputation may have suffered because he was a buttoned-down academic at a time when composers were supposed to be wild.”²⁰

Finally, just as with Bach’s music, it may be that not enough time has passed for Mennin’s music to be fully understood within the larger context of the music and culture around it. Even Mennin himself once stated, “You need the perspective of time in any real work of art.”²¹ Musicologist and composer Edith Borroff agrees:

¹⁸ Martin Bernheimer, "A Mennin Premiere in Pasadena," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 1986, 1.

¹⁹ "Peter Mennin," 310.

²⁰ Howard Dicus, *Clef's Notes: May 17, 1998* [Newswire] (United Press International, 17 May 1998, accessed 17 March 2003); available from http://mcc-b114.monroec.edu:2057/cgi-bin/cw_cgi?fullRecord+19196+6566+1:2763591+1+14.

²¹ Charles B. Suttoni, "Peter Mennin: The President of the Juilliard School Leads an Orderly Double Life as Composer and Academician," *Musical America* v. 30 (1980): 5.

[Mennin] was a vital figure in American music education. He is a vital figure also in living music...It takes time for the members of the vanguard to look back and appreciate the rainbow-scope of music from which a new style emerges. Perhaps that time has come; perhaps we are now ready for the excitement and the joy of savoring that scope²²

Borroff may be correct; Mennin's music is beginning to receive some new attention. In 1999, his *Concertato (Moby Dick)* made National Public Radio's list²³ of the 300 most important American musical works of the twentieth century.²⁴ Furthermore, orchestras and record labels, such as the Seattle Symphony and Phoenix USA, are revitalizing American music by performing, recording, or reissuing the works of Mennin and other domestic composers.²⁵

Within the past fifteen years, all of Mennin's symphonies, except for No. 1 (withdrawn) and No. 2, have been commercially recorded or reissued on compact disc. Mennin's Third and Seventh Symphonies were recently reissued from a 1965 recording by Dimitri Mitropoulos and the New York Philharmonic (No. 3), and from a 1968 recording by Jean Martinon and the Chicago Symphony (No. 7).²⁶ His Third and Seventh

²² Edith Borroff, "Record Reviews — Peter Mennin; Symphony No. 8; Folk Overture; Symphony No. 9 (Columbus Symphony Orchestra; Christian Badea, Conductor) (New World)." *American Music* v. 9, no. 3 (1991): 330.

²³ *NPR 100: Master List of Top 300 Songs*, [Web Page] (National Public Radio, 2003, accessed 6 March 2003); available from <http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/vote/300list.html>.

²⁴ Covering music from a variety of genres such as classical, jazz, musical theater, and rock, the 300 were then posted on NPR's web site for ten days and voted on by 14,000 voters. The original 300 songs were reduced to the top 100, though unfortunately, *Moby Dick* did not make that list. David Schiff, "The Tradition of the Oldie [National Public Radio's List of the Most Important American Works of the Twentieth Century]," *Atlantic Monthly* v. 287, no. 3 (2001): 97.

²⁵ Dewey Faulkner, "Recordings in Review," *Yale Review* v. 89 (2001): 172. Jeffrey Kaufman, *About Phoenix USA* 13 April 2003; available from <http://www.phoenixcd.com/About/>.

²⁶ Peter Mennin and others, *Peter Mennin: Symphonies Nos. 3 & 7; Piano Concerto* (New York, NY: CRI), sound recording.

(and Concertato "Moby Dick") were also newly recorded with Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony.²⁷ Symphony No. 4 was reissued from a 1973 performance by Abraham Kaplan and the Camerata Symphony.²⁸ Symphony No. 5 was reissued from a 1962 performance by Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Pops²⁹ and newly recorded, along with his Sixth Symphony, *Fantasia for String Orchestra*, and Concertato (*Moby Dick*), by David Allen Miller and the Albany Symphony.³⁰ A current recording of the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies and *Folk Overture* is available with Christian Badea and the Columbus Symphony.³¹

Likewise, new releases of other Mennin works include a 1995 recording of *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* performed by Jorge Mester and the Louisville Orchestra³² and a 1990 recording of *Sonata Concertante for Violin and Piano*.³³ Digital reissues include the Kohon Quartet performing his *String Quartet No. 2*³⁴ and Igor Buketoff, John Ogdon (piano), and the Royal Philharmonic performing his *Piano Concerto*.³⁵

²⁷ Peter Mennin, Gerard Schwarz, and Seattle Symphony Orchestra, *Peter Mennin: Moby Dick; Symphonies Nos. 3 & 7* (Hollywood: Delos), sound recording.

²⁸ Peter Mennin and others, *Symphony No. 4, "the Cycle"* (U.S.: Phoenix), CD.

²⁹ Charles Ives and others, *Hanson Conducts Ives, Schuman & Mennin* (New York: Polygram Records), sound recording.

³⁰ Peter Mennin, David Alan Miller, and Albany Symphony Orchestra, *Fantasia for String Orchestra; Concertato, "Moby Dick"; Symphony No. 5; Symphony No. 6* (Albany, NY: Albany Records), sound recording.

³¹ Peter Mennin and others, *Symphony No. 8 ; Folk Overture ; Symphony No. 9* (New York, NY: New World Records), sound recording.

³² Robert Kurka and others, *Kurka/Mennin/Piston: Orchestral Works* (Albany, NY: Albany Records), sound recording.

³³ John Corigliano and others, *American Violin Sonatas by Corigliano, Diamond, Lees, Mennin* (California: Bay Cities), CD.

³⁴ Kohon String Quartet and others, *American String Quartets 1900-1950* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: VoxBox), sound recording.

³⁵ Mennin and others, *Peter Mennin: Symphonies Nos. 3 & 7; Piano Concerto*.

Perhaps Mennin's most popular work is *Canzona for Band*, which is available on commercial recordings³⁶ and which school bands regularly perform. A basic search on OCLC WorldCat³⁷ reveals that it appears on over twenty-five school band recordings in the last decade.

As put by Jamake Highwater of the *Christian Science Monitor*, "After years of neglect, Mennin is beginning to get the attention he deserves."³⁸ This new attention revalidates his American compositional style and perhaps may lead to many new American works following his symphonic tradition. In any event, this new interest in his symphonies certainly supports the need for scholarly study of them and is echoed by *New York Times* critic Alex Ross, who simply states: "Mennin's nine symphonies deserve a second look."³⁹

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Because of interest in composing a new symphony for a junior orchestra modeled after Mennin's style, this project examines only his symphonies. This study excludes his other orchestral works for various reasons: the scoring of his chamber works⁴⁰ does not

³⁶ Gustav Holst and others, *Suites 1 & 2 / Folk Song Suite / Toccata Marziale* (Polygram Records), Keystone Wind Ensemble and others, *Dello Joio: Songs of Abelard...And Other World Premieres* (North Hollywood, CA: Citadel), sound recording, Rutgers Wind Ensemble and William Berz, *Transformations* (Clarence, New York: Mark Custom Recording Service), sound recording.

³⁷ The Online Computer Learning Center, Inc.'s WorldCat database contains 49 million bibliographic records from libraries across the world.

³⁸ Jamake Highwater, "New on CD: Bruckner to Barber from Chamber Music to Symphonies, Recent Choices Are Broad Recordings: Reviews," *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 August 1989, 11.

³⁹ Alex Ross, "Approaching the Finale of a Daring Era," *New York Times*, 27 January 1996.

⁴⁰ String Quartet No. 1(1941) and String Quartet No. 2 (1951).

fit the desired instrumentation requirements; his smaller orchestral works⁴¹ are not of a large enough scope; the solo parts for his four concertos⁴² may be too difficult for a typical community orchestra; and his compositions for orchestra and chorus⁴³ contain a chorus, which may not be practical for a community orchestra.

Chapter 2 contains a survey of all Mennin symphonies, including Symphony No. 4 (for orchestra and chorus) which does not fit this project's requirements as stated above. It is included to show the continuous development of his technique. Unfortunately, there is very little information and no score or recording available for Symphony No.1, since the composer withdrew it from publication.

While performing research for this dissertation, there were conflicting dates often found for the completion and premieres of Mennin's works. The sources consulted include Carl Fischer Music Publishers, Mary Jane Bowles Ayers' doctoral dissertation, *American Composers a Biographical Dictionary*, *The New Groves Dictionary of Music*

⁴¹ *Folk Overture* (1945), *Sinfonia for Chamber Orchestra* (1946), *Fantasia for String Orchestra* (1947), *Concertato for Orchestra ("Moby Dick")* (1952), and *Canto for Orchestra* (1961).

⁴² *Concertos for Cello and Orchestra*, *Flute and Orchestra*, *Piano and Orchestra*, and *Concertino for Flute, Strings, and Percussion* (1945).

and Musicians, Current Biography, and Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians.

The dates used for this study are from *Baker's Biographical Dictionary* because that source was the most inclusive, accurate, and included Mennin's unpublished works.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cantata de Virtute (*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, 1969), *The Christmas Story* (1949), and Symphony No. 4 (*The Cycle*, 1948).

⁴⁴ Peter Mennin, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*®, Centennial Edition. Nicolas Slonimsky, Editor Emeritus [Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group. 2003] (Schirmer, 2001, accessed 29 March 2003); available from <http://www.galenet.com/servlet/BioRC>.