

Gunther Schuller at ZMF 2009

Nancy Zeltsman: It's a huge, huge honor to introduce Gunther Schuller today. He's a man who's done everything, I think. He's written many, many books on jazz, he's working on an autobiography now; he was President of New England Conservatory, was the Music Director at Tanglewood for many years; he's been a record producer-

Gunther Schuller: Publisher.

Nancy Zeltsman: Publisher, French hornist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and first horn in the Cincinnati before that.

Gunther Schuller: Yeah, and Miles Davis, don't forget him.

Nancy Zeltsman: He's a winner of the MacArthur Genius Award and honorary degrees from BMI, and anything you want to name. He's also a very personally important person to me, my second father I would say. He really supported me for a bunch of years shortly after I got out of school. I worked for his publishing company out of his house for eight and a half years, which really changed my life, and is where I learned my work ethic of working hard. Because no one works harder than Gunther Schuller.

Also, I tipped them off yesterday ... You, maybe more than any composer I've had the opportunity to work with, changed my playing and my complete concept of sound, and my reverence for true fundamentals and balance. You have probably the most amazing pair of ears I've ever encountered. So, thank you, Gunther, for being here. (applause)

Gunther Schuller: [00:02:04] The last point that you made I'd like to get around to talking about a little bit, because it's a very important part of performing, of interpretation, of what we do with a piece of music.

But anyway, Nancy asked me to spend a little time talking about one of my pieces, and to, in front of your eyes and ears, break it down into whatever little segments it needs to be broken down to, and then put it together again. All of that is to show how, in this particular instance, I composed that piece, what the decisions were at any given point, getting from one little area to another, and how that turns out to be, I think, in the end, a coherent, unified piece of music.

This happens to be the first movement of a piece that I wrote for Marimolin. It was the first piece that I wrote for the marimba as a solo instrument, but it's not just for marimba, it's for violin and marimba. If you haven't heard that Marimolin recording, you've missed something,

because I'll stand right here and say their performances are as near perfect as anything you can get. And I get to say that very rarely.

But, that aside, this is the first movement. And just a little bit about my whole concept of composing, what the hell does that mean, what do you do, what's it all about? I'm not talking about technique, or craft, or skill, we know about that. Basically we know you have to have that, you have to get it, you have to train and get to it.

[00:04:14]

But there are more urgent things than that, and that is the whole idea of what should a composition contain in order to be a great work of art. We can have answers to that question when we look at all the great masterpieces that now exist in our musical history. I'm talking about the Bachs, the Beethovens, the Brahmses, the Schumanns, the Stravinskys, the Schönbergs, the whoevers. They've given us many indications of what they did, if we look at them carefully enough, and therefore what serves as a model as to what some of the most important things about a great composition are.

And one of the things that I am particularly keen about and concerned about nowadays, at the present time, is the idea of a musical idea, of substance. It's sort of a strange word to use in music, but by idea and substance I mean something that, when you hear it, it grabs you. And it grabs you because it's very striking. It's not ordinary, it's not what anybody could have done, it's what some people are able to do. It's original.

[00:05:58]

Now, I'm not a dictator, I don't demand from composers that they must be original, because guess what? You can't just one day get up and say, "I'm going to write a really original piece of music." That's a joke. I mean, if you're lucky to ever write anything original in your lifetime, that's already an achievement.

But I mean original in the sense that Beethoven almost reinvented music after Mozart and Haydn, and Stravinsky and Schönberg reinvented music again after the 19th century, those sorts of dramatic changes of the language, and in that, creating moments of music that grab you and you say, "Wow, what was that?" And it sticks in your memory. Now, here again, you can't just say, "Today, I'm going to write music of substance." But I keep trying.

So what I'm going to center on are the things that I feel in this little piece - It's only what, three and a half minutes long I think, I don't know - By the way, how many of you are composers, or you're only just marimbists? How many, raise your hands. Yeah, I'm talking to you too. In

fact, I'm going to make you work a little bit, not just listen. I'm going to make you think with me.

These are little ideas that are striking enough ... It's not the greatest thing that's ever been written, don't get me wrong, I'm very modest about it. But these are things which I think are, at the moment you hear them, interesting and challenging enough to make you listen. This has to do with, then, taking this piece, which is a kind of free-formed piece ... When I started, I didn't know where the heck it was going to go, it sort of composed itself. And it came out of an accumulation of these different ideas, these different pieces of music.

[00:08:19]

Now, when you do that, you have to be careful that these ideas somehow will relate to each other over the course of the piece. Because you could also have a piece of 17 different ideas, and none of them make any sense in the continuity of what happens. This happens at both the vertical level and at the horizontal level, the continuity level.

And the other thing that I want to mention as a particular characteristic of my music is a very strong, rich harmonic language, and the other thing is the color, the timbre, the sonority of instruments. These are my strongest points as a composer. I struggle with melody, and it seems that nobody even bothers to write melodies anymore except pop/rock people. They think they do. But anyway ...

This is sort of a fantasy where there is a great deal of variety in the overall continuity. But you'll see, once I've taken it apart for you, when we then will hear it in its entirety, you'll see that it all does flow from one moment to the next moment to the next in some kind of transition or bridge, something that connects those things, even though they are sometimes completely contrasting.

[00:10:07]

I did not use a theme in this piece, there's very little theme writing nowadays in contemporary music. Motifs, which is sort of the second cousin of a theme, those are also not being done very much, and for a very good reason. It's because the music, particularly the atonal/bitonal language of today, has gotten so complex in the things that you can do in this denser language, that the idea of a theme has sort of gone out of business, the way Beethoven used a theme, and worked on it, and developed it, created variations from it, and all kinds of ways of using a theme.

So this is not a theme, this first thing you're going to hear. It's an idea, it's a specific musical idea. And because of certain things that happen in it in the first two bars, it is fairly dramatic, it's declamatory, it's forceful. I think it gets your attention.

[00:11:26] (music: *Phantasmata - I. Maestoso* by Gunther Schuller - mm. 1-4)

For Nancy Zeltsman and Sharan Leventhal

PHANTASMATA

Gunther Schuller
(1989)

Maestoso
♩ = 58-60

Vln. *ff sfz p*

Mar. *ff p*

lowest mallet: medium soft; others: medium

bend gliss ord. vibr. pp dolce poco

Gunther Schuller: [00:11:46] We'll hear that again. Now, from that point on, after this dramatic opening and the music then quiets down, I do a little extension, and it goes into a very quiet, totally different mood. Someone might say, "Well, how can that work? You start with this big bang of an idea, and then comes some kind of quiet music, shouldn't you go on more with what you've just started?" Well, it depends. If you're writing a Mahler symphony, you can spend 15 minutes doing the first exposition, and then another 15 minutes doing the development. In a three-and-a-half minute piece, you don't do that.

So now, play the opening again, and now we'll go further, and you'll see how the music changes totally in character in these first 15 seconds. It gets very soft - it holds your attention, in fact, by being so soft - and it's a dramatic change from the strong and very vocal opening.

[00:13:04] (*Phantasmata* - mvt. I - mm. 1-6)

For Nancy Zeltsman and Sharan Leventhal

PHANTASMATA

Gunther Schuller
(1989)

Maestoso
♩ = 58-60

Vln.

Mar.
lowest mallet: medium soft;
others: medium

pp *sfz* *bend* *gliss* *v* *sfz*

ff *v* *v* *n* *ord. vibr.* *poco*

f *dim.* *p* *pp dolce* *poco*

port. dolce *espr.* *f* *dim.* *p* *emph. G* *emph. F#*

p *pp* *fleetingly* *p*

Gunther Schuller: [00:13:42] You heard this last phrase, it's a very tender, longing, yearning kind of (singing), which has been around in music forever. Oh yes, you know? Amongst other things. And the other thing that makes it sort of pretty is that it's in thirds. Up until now you had heard only minor seconds and sevenths, and all those other ugly dissonances that we love to hate. Here, suddenly, is this kind of pretty music. It has a kind of shimmering effect.

Now the music rises up again. It's just been subdued for a few bars, and now it rises up in a quite different kind of thing. It goes in parallel thirds combined with glissandos, swooping glissandos. They'll attract your attention, these are all things that you don't hear every day. And it goes back to the dramatic mood of the first three or four bars.

[00:15:01] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 6-10*)

port. dolce
espr.
fleetingly
gliss.
mp
mf
espr.
mp legato
p
pp
poco p
cresc.
mf
mp
pp
mp
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* Attempt to play bracketed notes with one mallet.

Gunther Schuller: [00:15:26] So now it tapers down again, and the music sort of evaporates with an ethereal tremolo, and dips down, and rises again into what will be coming next, which is quite different music again. I emphasize the variety of textures, and densities, and colors, and all of those things that you've already heard in these very few seconds of music.

[00:16:00] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 11-13*)

pp
poco p
cresc.
mf
mp
pp
mp
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pp
p
mp espr.
dim. molto
delicato
(no cresc.)

* Attempt to play bracketed notes with one mallet.

Gunther Schuller: [00:16:08] It just sort of evaporates up in the sky somewhere. Can you play that once more?

[00:16:23] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 11-13*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:16:39] Now comes a very tender bit of music, very sweet, which then again collapses into the low register to go back into a more dramatic mood.

[00:16:55] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 13-18*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:17:24] And notice how wonderfully soft and balanced Nancy is playing all these four-part chords. I mean, you've got to know how hard that is, all you tremolo players. Because my harmonies are very rich, and full, and chromatic, you have to hear every note. If you have what in jazz we call a raised ninth chord, and one of those notes ain't there fully, it's gone. It just becomes a boring triad or something.

And then you notice at the end of this section, what I did is I had both instruments descending, but they're in the same register and they circle

around each other. The violin is in eighth notes and triplets and sixteenths, and the marimba is in sixteenths and quintuplets. So none of it coordinates, they're all twisting around each other, an F-sharp and a G and an F-natural. And at the same time it makes a slide down into the middle register.

[00:18:42] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 13-19*)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece "Phantasmata - mvt. I" by Gunther Schuller, measures 13-19. The score is written on four staves. The top staff is for the violin, the second and third staves are for the marimba, and the bottom staff is for the piano. The music is in 4/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns including eighth notes, triplets, and quintuplets. Dynamics range from fortissimo (f) to pianissimo (pp). Performance instructions include "dim. molto", "cresc.", "delicato", "no cresc.", "dolce espr.", and "mp espr.". A circled "15" is written above the first measure of the second staff.

Gunther Schuller: [00:19:12] And now it almost sounds like maybe the end of the piece is coming. It doesn't quite do that, so I call it a kind of coda, but then I take that coda to make a repeat in the music, to come back again. The music is now dying away, and is, as I say, leading to something that's sort of left up in the air. What's going to happen next?

[00:19:45] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 19-25*)

Handwritten musical score for *Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 19-25*. The score is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. It features various dynamics including *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and *ff*, along with performance instructions like *dolce espr.*, *misterioso*, *poco riten.*, *tranquilla*, and *a tempo primo*. A tempo marking of quarter note = 54 is present. Measure numbers 20 and 25 are circled. The score shows a melodic line in the upper voice and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voice.

Gunther Schuller: [00:20:15] Now I go back to the original idea, which was this jumping figure, (singing), something like that. But this time I turn it upside down, and you'll hear it. Now, I don't claim this to be a new idea at all, Bach turned things upside down all the time, although on a small scale, just in terms of inversion, or in his fugues, taking themes and turning them upside down.

Beethoven, the whole last movement of the *Eroica* is a little four-note theme he stole from a cellist in Vienna. It went (singing) in one of that cellist's pieces, and he turned it upside down and turned it into (singing). And then the whole movement is based on that upside-down theme.

In the fifth symphony, after the development section, he brings the whole exposition back, and I don't know how many people realize this, but it's like he took the score and he did this. And suddenly everything that's in the flutes and piccolos and violins is in the basses and the contrabassoon. The stuff in the higher-middle register is now in the

lower-middle register, the lower-middle register moves ... Re-orchestrated, of course, to make that possible. So he did that.

And of course, turning big things upside down is no longer original, I just want to be very modest about this. I just did it because it's been around a long time. Not many people use it nowadays, I think.

So he's going to try to play both examples: the way it appears first, and then right after that how it comes when it comes in the recapitulation.

[00:22:18] (*Phantasmata* - mvt. I - mm. 1-4)

For Nancy Zeltsman and Sharan Leventhal

PHANTASMATA

Günther Schuller
(1984)

Maestoso
♩ = 58-60

Vln.
ff sfz bend gliss

Mar.
lowest mallet: medium soft;
others: medium
ff

ord. vibr.
dim. p pp dolce poco

5

[00:22:44] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 25-30*)

Handwritten musical score for *Phantasmata - mvt. I*, measures 25-30. The score is written on five systems of staves. The first system shows a tempo of quarter note = 54, "tranquilla", and dynamics "pp" and "ppp". A circled "25" is above the first staff. The second system has dynamics "sfz" and "f", and a tempo change to "a tempo primo". The third system has dynamics "f" and "ff", and tempo markings "ff marc." and "poco accel.". The fourth system has dynamics "f" and "ff", and "poco accel.". The fifth system has dynamics "sempre ff" and "agitato", and a tempo of quarter note = 66. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings.

Gunther Schuller: [00:23:05] So it's similar, but it's doing different things in each instrument, which in effect turns the music upside down. But now, because I don't want to continue with this playing upside down, I move that original music in a different direction, which is the next bit.

[00:23:26] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 29-30*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:23:31] Now it starts jumping, (singing), scoops and glissandos. And at the end of that comes a run up into the ... Play that.

[00:23:48] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 31-33*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:23:54] Now comes a totally new idea. Up until now, everything has been sort of, what you might say, contrapuntal. None of the two instruments were really coordinating vertically, hardly at any time. Each is doing different things, one is playing long notes, the other one's playing fast notes. Now, we suddenly have a section where, for the first time in this piece, there's a rhythmic unison. It's a kind of dramatic, energetic, rhythmic idea.

[00:24:27] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 33-39*)

Musical score for *Phantasmata - mvt. I*, measures 33-39. The score is in G minor (one flat) and 3/4 time. It features a piano and a violin. The piano part has a tempo marking of quarter note = 100. The violin part has a circled measure number 35. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like *sfz* and *dim.*

Gunther Schuller: [00:24:42] It's almost sneaking towards jazz. The next idea, then, moves it even closer.

[00:24:53] (*Phantasmata - mvt. I - mm. 37-42*)

Musical score for *Phantasmata - mvt. I*, measures 37-42. This section continues from the previous one, showing measures 37-42. It includes the same piano and violin parts. The piano part has dynamic markings like *sfz* and *dim.* The violin part has a circled measure number 40. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like *sfz*, *rit.*, and *dim.*

Gunther Schuller: [00:25:07] Now it calms down again. Everything is on a small scale, you can see. None of these things takes more than two or three bars because the whole piece is short.

Now it moves into the real coda, and it's very quiet music, it's almost like a chorale or a hymn. This is almost magical, the way they played this.

[00:25:40] (*Phantasmata* - mvt. I - mm. 43-end)

Handwritten musical score for *Phantasmata*, mvt. I, mm. 43-end. The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system shows a complex rhythmic and harmonic passage with dynamic markings like *mf*, *pp*, and *p*. The second system starts at measure 45 with a tempo change to *Meno mosso (quasi Chorale)* and a tempo of quarter note = 40. It includes markings like *con sord.*, *pp*, and *p*. The third system starts at measure 50 with a *lunga* (long) marking and includes *dim.*, *slow gliss*, *morendo*, and *ppp* markings. The piece ends with a double bar line and the date *Nov. 23, 1989*.

Gunther Schuller: [00:26:28] And, by God, the piece ends in C major. How about that, how's that for a 12-tone piece? If you've liked this music, as I hope some of you have, then you'd better be careful what you say about 12-tone music being inherently bad. I just want to play this harmonic progression at the end.

Nancy Zeltsman: I want to remind you, I think this is right, you told me that you dreamt this coda.

Gunther Schuller: It could be, yeah.

Nancy Zeltsman: I remember just after you wrote it, you said this little bit you're talking about now you had in a dream.

Gunther Schuller: Yes, I've had more of those. Some of them were pretty good. I'll just play out of rhythm. This is the opening chord, I haven't got enough fingers (playing piano). That's a six-part chord. The violin is playing two notes, and the marimba is doing this (plays). That's actually an A7 chord, but in first inversion, but with this in it.

Now, from that chord, what I do now is I move one note at a time while Nancy is tremolo-ing. So it goes from this one, I take that F-sharp to go to here. So now, you still have a clash of G and A-flat. Still pretty dissonant, but it's going to get more and more consonant. The next note I now move is that A-flat. All the other notes stay the same, I move the A-flat to an A-natural, which gets me nicer to C major eventually.

[00:28:51] Now, the third in this chord is E-flat. I want to go to C major, so of course, what do I do? I've now got the A in place, I go ... (plays). Then the last note to move is this damn B-natural, and I move it where to? C. So now you have this (plays). Then I take away the A, then you just have ... (plays). And then I take away the E, and then I take away the G, finally. So it's all sort of an extended modulation from a very dissonant chord to the purest music we have in music, which is this C major triad, or the elemental note. Could you play that last section once more?

Male Voice: Oh, yeah.

Gunther Schuller: So you hear it on the instruments. I played it for you because it's rather subtle and soft on the instruments. Especially with Nancy's boomers, it sounds very velvety.

[00:30:37] (*Phantasmata* - mvt. I - mm. 46-end)

Handwritten musical score for *Phantasmata*, mvt. I, mm. 46-end. The score is written on two systems of staves. The first system starts at measure 45 with a tempo of quarter note = 60. It includes markings for "Meno mosso (quasi chorale)", "con sord.", and dynamics "pp" and "p". The second system starts at measure 50 with a tempo of quarter note = 40. It includes markings for "lunga", "dim.", "slow gliss", "morendo", and dynamics "ppp". The score ends with the date "Nov. 23, 1989" and a handwritten number "4" below the staff.

Gunther Schuller: [00:31:13] It's what we nowadays call a takeaway, one note at a time.
 Okay, can we play the whole piece? Let's play the whole piece now.

[00:31:22] (*Phantasmata* - mvt. I - complete)

For Nancy Zeltsman and Sharan Leventhal

PHANTASMATA

Gunther Schuller
(1984)

Maestoso
♩ = 58-60

Vln.

Mar.
lowest mallet: medium soft;
medium: soft;
others: medium

* Attempt to play bracketed notes with one mallet.

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Musical score for measures 12-14. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Measure 12 starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The music features a melodic line with a slur and a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 13 includes a 'dim. molto' instruction. Measure 14 begins with a piano (pp) dynamic and a 'delicato' marking. The bottom staff has a triplet of eighth notes and a 'no cresc.' instruction.

Musical score for measures 15-19. Measure 15 is marked with a circled '15' and a piano (p) dynamic. The top staff has a trill and a slur. The bottom staff has a piano (pp) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 16 includes a 'cresc.' instruction. Measure 17 has a '5 cresc.' instruction. Measure 18 has a '5' instruction. Measure 19 has a '6' instruction and a 'dolce espr.' marking. The bottom staff has a 'mf' dynamic and a 'mp > p' dynamic change.

Musical score for measures 20-24. Measure 20 is marked with a circled '20' and the tempo marking 'misterioso'. The music is in a 5/4 time signature. The top staff starts with a piano (pp) dynamic. The bottom staff also starts with a piano (pp) dynamic. Measure 21 has a 'pp' dynamic. Measure 22 has a 'mp' dynamic. Measure 23 has a 'p' dynamic. Measure 24 has a 'poco riten.' marking.

Musical score for measures 25-26. Measure 25 is marked with a circled '25' and the tempo marking 'a tempo primo'. The top staff starts with a piano (pp) dynamic. The bottom staff starts with a piano (p) dynamic. Measure 26 has a 'ppp' dynamic. The tempo marking 'a tempo primo' is written above the staff.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece, consisting of several systems of staves. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, time signatures (4/4), and various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Dynamics like *sfz*, *f*, *ff*, and *sempre ff* are used throughout. Performance instructions include *energico*, *ff marc.*, *poco accel.*, *accl.*, and *arco pizz*. There are also tempo markings such as *agitato* with metronome markings $\text{♩} = 66$, $\text{♩} = 76$, and $\text{♩} = 100$. The score includes complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. A circled number 30 is present in the middle section, and a circled number 35 is in the bottom section. The piece concludes with a circled number 3.

Handwritten musical score for the first system, featuring a treble and bass clef with complex rhythmic patterns and a sfz dynamic marking.

Handwritten musical score for the second system, including a glissando, ritardando, and a circled measure number 40.

Handwritten musical score for the third system, showing a transition from mf to pp dynamics.

45 $\text{♩} = 60$
Meno mosso (quasi Chorale)
con sord. $\text{♩} = 40$

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, starting with a circled measure number 45 and a tempo change to Meno mosso.

50

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system, featuring a long note and various dynamics like dim., slow gliss, morendo, and lunga ppp.

Nov. 23, 1989

Gunther Schuller: [00:34:55] There's an interesting thing that happens, especially when you have that many big harmonies. By the way, I should just mention that for me to write for the marimba, solo marimba, where you can only play four notes at a time, it's not easy for me. Because I like big eight-note, 12-note, 17 1/2-note chords, and they can be soft and beautiful, they can be harsh and dissonant and dramatic, they can be all kinds. And that's where European music had gone by the beginning of the 20th century, with *The Rite of Spring*, and Schönberg's *Erwartung*, and pieces like that.

But anyway, I love these harmonies, so I was happy to use here a violin which could actually play two notes, along with the four notes of the marimba. So I could make all these six-part chords. I had it pretty easy, I thank you in retrospect.

But anyway, the thing that happens at this ending is that, when you play in this lower octave on a marimba - and this is the one thing I don't like about the instrument, I kind of like it for what it is, but it interferes with certain things in music - it produces a lot of harmonics. If you play the low C, you get the G above, sometimes you get the E.

And of course, when you have six notes, each of them now producing their whole set of harmonics, my harmonies get a little muddled up. That's why you can't quite hear them as clearly. Because when I release, I think it's the E near the end, there's an E still ringing from the C that's still being played. Well, I didn't want that. But we may talk about the harmonic question.

[00:37:06] So anyway, I hope that gives you an idea of how at least this guy composes. I don't say there's anything special about it, it's just what I happen to do. There are all kinds of very interesting, exciting music being composed.

I am a little bit worried today about - this comes from the minimalist movement - what I call *patterning*, *pattern music*, where you actually don't have a musical idea at the beginning. You just start a bunch of instruments in some rhythmic idea, and it's usually sixteenth notes moving pretty lively, and then you just keep that up and you bury it as much as you can.

But it ends up being sort of where you could drop the needle anywhere and it's still sort of the same music. It hasn't had an idea, and therefore there was no idea to develop, and it doesn't have any other idea. I worry, there's a lot of that music, and that's very easy to write. But to write music in the sense of what we've learned from the masters, with all of their tricks of the trade, of how they take an idea and how they work it ...

If you look at Beethoven's variation pieces, all those piano pieces, and Bach's Goldberg Variations, all these things, you find out what an immensely rich repertory of possibility it is that we should use. We don't have to, we can also write a homophonic piece, I've written a lot of pieces with just a pretty tune and an accompaniment, everybody loves that.

But when you get into polyphonic thinking, where more than one idea is going on simultaneously, then it gets a little bit more complex for most people to follow what the heck is going on. And that's why, of course, the Gershwins, and the Cole Porters, and the Jerome Kerns, they wrote melodies with a simple accompaniment. They're great masterpieces, they're absolutely remarkable, they're as good as any Schubert song.

[00:39:13] But we live now in a much more complex world, and I just want to be in that. I don't want to simplify my music, especially not particularly for audience taste, because audiences most of the time don't know what we're doing anyway.

So anyway, I thought maybe now we could segue to you playing Marimbology.

Nancy Zeltsman: ... All of it?

Gunther Schuller: No, just that fourth movement. (laughter) It's just another side of me. This is a really virtuoso piece, and just for marimba. It goes at an enormous pace. This is a very dreamy, fantasy-like piece, and this is totally different, this is almost like a rhythm exercise, practicing scales and stuff.

Nancy Zeltsman: Ok, well you've all heard me play as much as I've played already today, which was six measures of rolls in Lyle's talk. You really want me to do this, huh? Okay.

Gunther Schuller: Well, I asked you, you agreed.

Nancy Zeltsman: [00:41:04] Hang on, let me just putter for a second. Talk amongst yourselves. (laughter)

Gunther Schuller: The trouble is, I never repeat notes. I know you guys like this, I know.

Nancy Zeltsman: Actually, you do in this piece.

[00:41:27] (music: *Marimbiology - IV. Toccata* by Gunther Schuller - complete)

Very fast, at least $\text{♩} = \frac{108}{4}$ IV - Toccata

1 *f*

5 *ff* *mf*

8 *f* *mp*

12 *f* *mf leggiero*

17 *f* *ff marc.*

21 *p sub.* *f* *mf*

25 *p sub.* *cresc.* *mf* *f*

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece, measures 30-55. The score is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. It includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Measure numbers 30, 34, 38, 42, 47, 51, and 55 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves. The piece features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *sf*, *p*, *sfzp*, *mf*, *f*, *fp*, *psvb.*, and *f*. Performance instructions like *tr* (trills) and *molto legato* are present. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

59

64

68

72

77

82

87

92

Handwritten musical score for guitar, measures 96-130. The score is written on ten staves. Measure 96 is a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. Measures 100, 105, 109, and 113 are single staves with a treble clef. Measures 118, 122, 126, and 130 are single staves with a bass clef. The music features various dynamics including *ff*, *f*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*, and *f*. It includes articulation marks such as accents (>), slurs, and breath marks (8-). Measure 118 contains a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 130 contains a triplet of eighth notes and a 3/7 time signature. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

134

⊕ ossia opt. ending

139

136

⊕ ossia

140

144

(applause)

Nancy Zeltsman: [00:44:52] There's nobody in the world for whom I would play that cold except Gunther. All right ... This one?

Gunther Schuller: Just play that ... No, the chromatic one.

Nancy Zeltsman: Oh, the chromatic one.

[00:45:09] (*Marimbology - mvt. IV - mm. 115-122*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:45:20] The guy has some nerve writing a mere chromatic scale.

Nancy Zeltsman: It's 12-tone music!

Gunther Schuller: Yeah, well that was the whole idea.

[00:45:27] (*Marimbology - mvt. IV - mm. 115-129*)

Nancy Zeltsman: [00:45:44] This is the killer.

[00:45:53] (*Marimbology - mvt. IV - mm. 130-131*)



Nancy Zeltsman: [00:45:58] Jack is premiering Gunther's new piece, and we were talking about how it just kills us to play wrong notes because the notes are so good.

Gunther Schuller: Well, thank you.

Nancy Zeltsman: In any piece, but ...

[00:46:12] (*Marimbology - mvt. IV - mm. 130-131*)

Gunther Schuller: [00:46:20] Yeah, well thank you for that. (applause)

So, I thought it would be nice if we could just have some questions. I'm open to talking about anything, including the marimba world, and the harmonics on the marimba. Yes?

Jack Van Geem: I would love to hear something about your experience with Miles Davis, and how it did or didn't influence things that you did later on with your composing.

Gunther Schuller: Well, I consider myself extremely fortunate. In the days when the French horn was hardly ever used in jazz yet - it has now come in full force - but I was one of the pioneer jazz horn players in New York. Miles started making this series of recordings later called Birth of the Cool, and it was inspired by the music of a very great orchestra which is much too little recognized and remembered, Claude Thornhill.

Claude Thornhill's orchestra was unique in jazz because he was the complete antithesis to the loud, blaring, constantly hot, rhythmic jazz. That was great, I mean that was Basie, that was Ellington, that was Woody Herman, Benny Goodman.

But Claude Thornhill's band was like they put a mute on the whole orchestra. And in order to achieve that, he used all the low and dark instruments in the orchestra, he used the tuba, he used two French horns, he used the baritone very much, he used bass clarinet, and at one point in his band he had seven clarinets, which gave it a whole velvety

kind of sound. Anyway, this was totally rejected at that time. "What kind of jazz is that? Sounds like some classical music."

[00:48:36]

But that was an 18-piece orchestra, and what Miles Davis had the idea of, with Gil Evans, was to take that sonority, that sound, and take the high instruments, not out of them, but playing a lesser role, and bringing it down into the low register in the warm, dark instruments.

So it ended up being alto sax and trumpet, the only two high instruments, and they're not very high, the highest note that Miles plays is a concert C. Then you have a baritone, you have a horn, you have a tuba, and you have of course a bass. So that's how it came to be a nonet.

The original horn player, who played with Miles in the first recording sessions, was not available, he went to California and played with Stan Kenton. And John Lewis, who was the pianist in the nonet, Miles asked him, "We've got to get a horn player for this recording day," and he said, "Get Gunther, he'll be fine." So I ended up playing there, and I made those four recordings with Miles Davis.

In answer to the second part of your question, whether I was influenced by that: no, I had been influenced by jazz long before that. It's sort of strange nowadays, the only two jazz musicians that are actually ever remembered anymore and talked about at any length - and they're talked about at great length - are Miles Davis and John Coltrane. It's like nobody else exists.

[00:50:21]

So it isn't that just because I happened to be with Miles Davis - and I worked with him many, many times after that - that therefore I became the kind of composer I am. Not at all, I was that kind of composer already. I just was happy to be there, and to participate in one of the greatest jazz compositions/arrangements/recompositions in the history of jazz, which is the piece called Moon Dreams, which is on that particular session in 1950 where I played. It's one of Gil Evans' absolute ... Well, it is his great masterpiece along with Porgy and Bess. I just happened to be there.

Miles and I worked together a lot, you can read it in my autobiography when it comes out, it's very interesting. Not gossip stories, but very interesting things about all kinds of musicians, Bill Evans, Gil Evans, John Lewis, things that are important in the history of music that those guys did. I was in the middle of all of that.

Miles was a genius, but I think he has been overrated, just as Coltrane has been overrated in comparison to, for example, Eric Dolphy. Eric and John were like soul brothers, they loved each other, and they competed

with each other in what we call a friendly rivalry. John thought that Eric was the greatest, and Eric thought that John was the greatest. Well, now you don't hear anything about Eric Dolphy, who was absolutely his own individual, just as John Coltrane was. And you don't hear even about Dizzy Gillespie anymore, it's all the talk about Miles.

[00:52:20] But anyway, that's a personal little grievance I have. We worked together, John Lewis and I commissioned pieces, from J. J. Johnson and other composers, where Miles would be the soloist. In one of those he made his first appearance on the flugelhorn, which made his tone even fatter and warmer.

Nancy Zeltsman: One time when I was working for you, for some reason nobody picked up the house phone, and I usually just answered the office phone, but I thought, "Oh, I'll pick it up." The voice said, "Is Gunther there?" I said, "Yeah, can I ask who's calling?" "Tell him it's Dizzy."

Gunther Schuller: On that subject ... I'm reluctant to talk about it, but I consider myself so fortunate that ... This all has to do with being born in New York, and growing up in New York, and starting to play professionally at age 16. Guess what? With the New York Philharmonic and Toscanini. That's starting at the very top. That's all luck, and I can explain how that's luck.

But then the introduction to jazz for me, that happened basically because of my discovery of Duke Ellington's music when I was 13 years old. But then I met John Lewis, and he introduced me to the whole inner core of the jazz world. That's why everybody you can name or mention I knew intimately, I worked with, wrote for, hired them. I was in the thick of it, just with a lousy French horn. How lucky can you be? And I've feasted on that all of my life.

[00:54:21] But that doesn't mean that I turned into a jazz composer, obviously I didn't. Of the 200 pieces that I've written, there are only probably 35 that are in one way or another associated with jazz elements, jazz ideas, jazz pieces. The rest of it is free of jazz. Although, I guess anyone born in America, and growing up in this country, and hearing the music in this country, especially if you grew up in my time when radio was just full of jazz, there wasn't any television yet, nothing but jazz.

Country music hadn't been invented yet, rock and roll hadn't been invented yet, just jazz. So you grow up with jazz. Elliott Carter has jazz in him, Roger Sessions has jazz in him, Milton Babbitt does. There's always jazz in me. But I'm talking about a conscious use of jazz ideas. I only did that in about 35 of my 200 pieces. I'm a free man, I can do what I want.

Female Voice: I'd like to go back to something you said earlier. You sort of expressed displeasure with minimalism, and I'm wondering ... The last big turn that you mentioned was Stravinsky and Schönberg, do you then not think that the introduction of non-Western music into Western art music in the form of minimalism is not the next big turn? And if it wasn't, where do you think it's going?

Gunther Schuller: [00:56:09] Well. I'm like George Washington, I cannot tell a lie. I will tell you that I feel - this is just my opinion, doesn't mean anything - I just think minimalism is, in the hands of the best composers of that ... And the three best to my mind are Steve Reich, John Adams, and Louis Andriessen, a Dutch composer who's maybe the greatest of all the minimalist composers.

I think it's a detour. It's a very interesting side way, and it is now running out of steam. I predicted that it would, and in fact both Steve and John say to me now, "You know, I never was a minimalist." When I say to them, "Listen, guys, you're getting more and more maximal all the time." Because they are, they're coming back.

Now, this is not terribly important. There has been some very good minimalist music, very interesting, fascinating music. But, as something that moves the music forward in the way that music moved forward from the 12th century up to the middle of the 20th century, in one gigantic, upward, forward progression, with some bumps in the road where some dramatic changes took place. But it's still in the same lineage, it's in the same language, it's in the same basic continuity of how the ideas in music developed.

[00:57:56] This all came to a sort of crashing halt in the latter part of the 20th century, and minimalism was the first bellwether of that. One of the things that gives me some courage to say this is the word itself. "Minimalism" implies a limitation. My absolute ideal of what is the greatest music, what is the greatest that music can be, is to never, never limit itself in any way, but to be totally free, totally open. And I don't mean politically or ideologically, just open creatively.

Now, within that big spectrum, let me back up. We start with Pérotin in the 12th century, writing organum pieces in fifths and fourths. Then eventually we get the major third, and the church tried to forbid that for 200 centuries [sic]. Then you get the sevenths, my god, the dominant seventh came into music in the 17th century. And then you get, later in the 19th, you get to ninth chords and eleventh chords, and then you spill over into bitonality, and that spills over into atonality. That is one linear progression. I didn't make this up, this is just what happened.

And guess what, why did it happen? Because it followed the harmonic series. It went from the basic notes of a harmonic series, and went out to the outer extensions. One other way of describing atonality is that it deals more with those upper notes, the 15ths, 17ths, 18th partial in a harmonic series, than it does with the basic notes. This is just a logical growing up in music by composers with incredible ears and minds who wanted to explore ever more, greater territory.

[01:00:12]

So, in that sense, again, minimalism, by suddenly taking a lot of things out that are not in that music - it's called minimalism, just like there's minimalist poetry, minimalist literature - it is, I think almost by definition, a limitation. Now, it's a very interesting limitation, just like Stravinsky's neoclassicism was a very fantastic, limited period. He wrote some unbelievable masterpieces. So did Darius Milhaud, and a whole bunch of other people.

But, in the end, it turned out that that was a dead end, eventually it ran out of steam. It was an interesting 30-year period, but it was just during that time that the atonal - I prefer to call it chromatic - language continued to develop with the so-called Second Viennese School. And eventually Stravinsky himself turned to 12-tone because he recognized that what he had done so beautifully was really wonderful, but it was in the wrong direction.

So this is what I know from my study of that history, and what I've gleaned from listening and conducting all that music and teaching about it. There's nothing wrong, ever, with anybody doing anything. But for me, as a kind of analytical, maybe sort of a German scientist type - I'm of German background, I can't help it - for me, that's not what's most interesting. It's what lasts the most, or to put it another way, what music, what literature, what poetry, what choreography, has there been and is there that allows for some development further into the future?

[01:02:22]

These detours don't allow that. They eventually come to a dead end. So again, that doesn't mean that's bad, or no good. In the end, I don't care what label you put on music, classical, schmactical, jazz, pop, rock, neoclassic, minimalist, exotic, erotic, whatever. It depends on what a composer does with this label. The particular concept of a music and whatever name it acquires guarantees nothing. It doesn't guarantee that it's going to be great music.

There's been more horrible classical music written in over the last 500 years than you can possibly imagine. If you read a whole bunch of encyclopedias and dictionaries, you would see all those names that are in that encyclopedia who wrote 57 operas, and 37 cantatas, and 99

concertos for violin and bassoon. And we don't even know they exist. We now play only the best classical music from 200 years ago.

So anyway, classical music, it doesn't guarantee that it's going to be great, it doesn't say that it's going to be bad. It depends who does it. Beethoven did it pretty well. His student, Hummel, didn't do it quite as well. So what? That's the way it is, we're all variously talented.

[01:03:56]

And so all this name-calling, or name-identifying, is very, very counterproductive. Because ultimately, as I just said, it can be any kind of music there is, including all the great ethnic musics around the world. There are 300,000 incredible ethnic folk musics from Borneo to Greenland to South Africa to Serbia, wherever. All of that has the potential of being fantastically great, and all of it has, of course, in the hands of less good practitioners, being not so great. That's the world we live in, and that's true, by the way, of every field of human endeavor anyway.

And to keep my sanity, since now minimalist music is being declared the most important music in the United States, and the best music, those are the most successful composers, I have to think about that. I have to keep my sanity, because if that's true, well then I'm really nobody. And it's not so easy to accept that I'm nobody. So I have to think about this. Where do all these things fit in?

One can take the measurements. How we measure such things is to go back through the history and ask ourselves, "What are the greatest achievements in music that we sanctify, glorify, are never tired of hearing, always want to hear again? What is it that made those pieces that great?"

[01:05:48]

And one of the many answers one can give to that is that those composers did everything that it was possible within their talents, and with the tools of music that we have, that could be achievable. They did everything. Bach's St. Matthew Passion does everything that music could do at that time. And I could go into details about that. But the idea, therefore, of something that's minimalist, and that cuts out certain things, is to me an interesting, but lesser, achievement. You don't have to take my word for it.

I mean, what happened just in jazz? When you listen to the jazz music of the 40s and the 50s and the 60s, and the incredible enrichment of the jazz language, the jazz harmonic language, that began with bebop. We got into bitonality, it happened through the so-called flatted fifth. And there came to be this very rich chromatic language which you hear in all sorts of great masterpieces, a lot of them by Duke Ellington.

That language is not used anymore. Now we have modal, which is pentatonic. You've already reduced it from 12 to five notes, pentatonic is five-note music. You have thousands of pieces that are now being played and recorded that are modal, and that was started by Miles Davis. At the time, it was a novel way of simplifying the highly chromatic music that came before that, from his idol, Dizzy, for example. Okay, so he simplified it a little bit and it did some wonderful things.

[01:07:51]

But it finally led to being so simple and so accessible that everybody started doing it. I heard a piece by Dave Holland, who's a great bass player and is a composer of big, extended pieces. I heard a piece a couple of years ago where there wasn't even one dominant seventh chord in the whole piece. It was all fourths and fifths. I couldn't believe it. And there also, by the way, were no dynamics, it was just forte, four movements of forte music.

So there's a lot of things happening now in jazz which are such a diminishment of what happened in the years that I feel I was so lucky to be in the middle of. And that harmonic language went from bitonality to tritonicity to polytonality, and then spilled over into atonality with Ornette Coleman, and with the pianist Cecil Taylor, and people like that, and Monk. Monk was going into atonality, still based on basic changes and so on.

So I'm loath to believe that we had 700 years of one marvelous crescendo of a progression, expanding the language of music, and that somehow now that should have stopped with Schönberg in 1912, and we have to go backwards. I just can't believe that. And some people say, "Well look, we've exhausted the language, we've gone as far as we can." I don't believe that's possible with human nature. We are capable of always moving forward.

[01:09:51]

And I'll say one more thing, since I'm giving a half-hour lecture here, there have been periods like this before in the history of music, where it didn't know where it was going and it came to a standstill. And then somebody came to the rescue, and maybe that somebody was Haydn. So these valleys, as opposed to the peaks, they occur. They occur in every human endeavor. Everything is a series of cyclical swings, from peaks to valleys, everything, whether it's medicine, or music, or science, or whatever.

I just can't believe that the time has come where we human beings have become incapable, or worse yet that we should not, expand our harmonic language further. I happen to know some incredibly beautiful microtonal music. It's been out there for almost 100 years now, and

there's a very few people who do it just so beautifully that you cry. The music is so ... musical.

You understand what I'm saying. I'm a fairly intelligent person, and I know some people who are a thousand times more intelligent, and brilliant, and searching, and exploring, and creative than I am. And I say to myself, "It can't be that we're going to be stuck now." It's like 1984, an Orwellian world, finally the lid is put on, this is it now. So, minimalism has had its place, and I think it's drifting back towards the center, for lack of better words.

Male Voice: [01:12:12] So do you feel like microtonality pieces need more attention? Composers like Ben Johnston, and ...

Gunther Schuller: What kind of tonality?

Male Voice: Microtonality.

Gunther Schuller: Microtonality, that it's what?

Male Voice: Do you think that it deserves more attention?

Gunther Schuller: Oh, well chromatic music ... You see, I wish we wouldn't use these words like dissonance and so on. I prefer to use the word, in regard to 12-tone music, highly chromatic music, high chromaticism. Let's forget all this 12-tone crap, because it's just a very negative word. Or the word dissonance. I want to use "intensity". A tri-tone has an intensity that a major third doesn't have; a minor second has an incredible intensity. It's not a dissonance, not today. In Bach's time it was a dissonance and it had to be resolved. We don't have to resolve a minor second anymore. So I talk about intensity.

To come back to the point, if minor seconds and major sevenths, semitone relationships, are highly intense, and combusive, and thrilling, and exciting, then microtonal is going to be even more. Because now you can have 12 more pitches, if you just talk about quarter-tone music. So that's a very exciting future. But right now, ain't nobody going there because we've got to write this accessible, pretty music so we keep the audiences happy.

[01:13:53] But great composers don't write really for audiences, or certainly don't write down to audiences. And they don't go by ratings. Beethoven would never have written the Hammerklavier sonata, which is such an unbelievable piece that you can't even figure out how a human being could have created that at that time. It's always pushing the envelope,

always. And audiences don't like the envelope to be pushed, so you have to be very careful about that aspect of it.

I'm very philosophical, and in a way a little bit moral, about all of this. Because it ultimately also has to do with integrity, personal, artistic integrity. You came into this world to do something with whatever talents your genes give you. And the obligation is to do the utmost within your talents to do the greatest things in that realm, and always to the limits of your abilities. You can also occasionally write easier pieces, lovelier pieces, shorter pieces, whatever, you can do anything. But the ultimate goal is to get up to this other level.

That's what Shakespeare did, and that's what Beethoven did, and that's what Marcel Proust did, and that's what Einstein did. That's what the great human beings of our history do. They don't give a damn about whether they're making any money with it. I mean, they'd like to have the money, but I can swear to you, I never wrote one piece of music because of money. I received money, yes, but I would have written it anyway. It's a sacrificial life, and that's why I use the word moral. Not sexual moral, I mean other moral.

[01:16:18]

So those are some pretty tough, deep thoughts. But I philosophize about this because that's the only way I can keep my sanity of where things are and where they belong. Because otherwise you end up liking everything, or liking nothing, and you don't have any criteria by which you can decide what you like or you don't like except "I like it." Well, that's not enough, because what you like may be based on all kinds of false premises that happen to be your background by accident.

I happened to grow into a wonderful family of musicians. My sons, jazz players, are the sixth generation of musicians in my family. And I was fortunate, through my parents, and growing up in New York, and at age 16 moving into the inner circle of the greatest musical capital of the world, New York, living and working there. That's all luck, that's just chance, happenstance.

But I had the talent to feast on that, to feed on that, and to nourish my soul and my talent with all the things that I could study and pick up in that rich cultural climate. It's been one hell of a trip, boy. And I'm still learning, I study every day. It's very humbling. And it isn't about ourselves, it's about what we can give to the world. That's pretty high stakes.

I've got you pretty silent. All right, let's call it a day. (applause)