

Preface

Western art is accustomed to novelties. New musical styles must cope with the expectations of the different, the unheard, the unexpected, the unimagined or unimaginable, of the inexperienced, the unique, the different, the authentic, even of the incommensurable. The novelty-oriented culture is somehow “self-evident” in spite of the voices that question it. The novelty—the production of an other—is a “must” of our everyday life even in the arts.

However, strong attachment to tradition, pragmatic links to different “futures pasts,” to paraphrase Koselleck’s idea of conceptual histor(iograph)y, tend to take our attention away from the fact that there are but a number of re-evaluations of certain values that fill up the history of Western music and that the ideas of revolution, avant-garde, progressivism, modernism and the like are but handy, pragmatic tricks. The notorious difference between revolution and evolution in which Arnold Schoenberg found the difference very handy is not a difference of opposing substantial concepts but of cultural complementarity: the Expressionism of the *fin de siècle* grew into a variegated, heterogeneous and heteronomous set of phenomena by the 1930s—there is hardly any doubt about its colorful existence in the era of the video and gaming-loving culture. Moreover, if Expressionism was a “deepening” of the artistic endeavors fundamental to Impressionism, we should differentiate the pragmatic breaks between the “knuckles” of the long historical tail connecting different modernisms throughout music history with mimetic theory.

Leaving the historical perspective aside for a moment, we would like to emphasize five fundamental joints or “waves” as crucial for today’s music culture: 1) Impressionism paved the way for folk-music-oriented imagery, 2) Expressionism elevated the “freedom of expression,” 3) electroacoustic music offered amplification of expression of different kinds, 4) Neoclassicism stimulated “New Age” realism as well as the rituals of the middle-class, while 5) popular music (in its widest sense) encouraged heterogeneous musical idioms empowering the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture. The five indicated phenomena may be understood as the musical analogy to what Matei Calinescu epitomized as the faces of modernity in twentieth-century literature: these concepts coexist today on different levels of different musical practices. Microtonality is certainly one of them.

Microtonality is usually addressed as one of the “technical” aspects of modern musical production and reproduction, although it has a fairly longer history within modern-age music theory as well as ethnomusicological research practices. We believe that microtonality is one of the fundamental change-indicating concepts in Western music history. The search for the new brought about a break in the tonal system, and microtonality is the central aesthetic, theoretical, and perceptual concept: it has been advocated as being the further differentiation of the tonal system that may offer highly elaborated—highly differentiated—poetic idea(l)s. Besides, microtonality is a common issue in folk music, Expressionism, electro-acoustic music, and the contemporary DIY music culture as well as in the New Age culture, music in the world of smart technologies, and sound art. All these “waves” of modern music practices include microtonality as common topic.

This collective monograph focuses on the development of microtonal music in Eastern and Central Europe from World War I to the present. The authors examine how diverse concepts of microtonality have given way to new composition theories and practices. These scholars hold the view that even between WWI and WWII, microtonal music and its theoretical reflection was the outstanding contribution of Eastern and East-Central European composers to the contemporary discourse of avant-garde music. That provoked radical changes in the composition and performance practice of new music and affected several generations, sustaining and transforming early avant-garde insights.

The volume is organized into four section topics. Throughout the book, our contributors explore the interactions of Central/Eastern European and Western music and musicians as creative forces that illuminated cross-cultural exchange. The first two sections address the issue of current microtonal trends in both composition and performance, presenting analytical studies and composers’ reflections on their practice. The section “Microtonality Versus Microchromatics: Concepts and Contexts” begins with the chapter by Lidia Ader that encompasses a broad interdisciplinary context from which early twentieth-century microtonal music evolved. The overview of the contemporary microtonal composition practices in Slovenia, Lithuania, Serbia, and Latvia is continued in the chapters of this section by Leon Stefanija, Rima Povilionienė, Miloš Zatkalik, and Simas Sapiega, combining historical and philosophical approaches with analytical study. The second section, “Contemporary Practice of Composing and Performing of Music with Microintervals,” provides composers’ own reflections on aesthetic orientations and microtonal compositional techniques presented in the chapters by Agustín Castilla-Ávila (Austria), Zoran Šćekić (Croatia), Rytis Mažulis (Lithuania), and Tomaž Svete (Slovenia).

The third and fourth sections focus on a historical exploration of early microtonality in Central and Eastern Europe: the ekmelic movement and Alois Hába's microtonal music school and its international reception. In the section "The History of Microtonal Music in Central and Eastern Europe: Alois Hába and His School" Vlasta Reittererová and Lubomír Spurný discuss the historical role of Alois Hába as a leading protagonist of the Central European interwar avant-garde that moved between Vienna, Berlin, and Prague. The following chapter of the third section by Rūta Stanevičiūtė examines Hába's creative impulses that laid the foundations for the modernization of music beyond the great centers of new music in Europe by exploring the beginnings of microtonal music in Lithuania. The fourth section ("Ekmelic Music") offers two articles by Franz Richter Herf—the founder of the concept of ekmelic music—and his co-authors, presenting an important source of knowledge on the twentieth-century transformation of microtonality.

This volume is a testimony to a watershed in research on the history of the microtonal music of East-Central and Eastern European countries. Taken together, the collection presents new research as well as some testimonies on a rich and varied theories and practices of microtonal music in Czechia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Austria. A wide-ranging collection of studies is a nice opportunity to share information on microtonality from the involved countries with the international scholarly community. Namely, the contributors explore the interactions of Central/Eastern European and Western music and musicians as creative forces that illuminated cross-cultural exchange. Viewed as a whole, this volume is neither a comprehensive nor an exhaustive account on microtonality within the discussed musical cultures. However, individual contributions as well as the whole volume—and this was exactly what the editors were after—encourage further interest and discussion about history and contemporary musical practices involving microtonality, hopefully not only in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Leon Stefanija and Rūta Stanevičiūtė