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Review of Evan Jones, ed., *Intimate Voices: The Twentieth Century String Quartet* (Rochester University Press, 2009)

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[1] This two-volume, 750-page tome, edited by Evan Jones, is a major contribution both to music analysis and to scholarship on the string quartet. It comprises essays by some of today's leading theorists, each one taking on a single composer and closely examining his or her approach to the string quartet. As such, it is truly a scholarly *tour de force,* a monumental assembly—both in size and essence—of analytical and historical approaches to the genre. (1)

[2] The collection consists of twenty chapters, organized more or less chronologically according to each composer's years of productivity in the genre of string quartets, and grouped roughly around some unifying concept, school of thought, or relationship to other composers. To wit, in Volume 1 we find: "New Voices from the Old World" (Debussy and Ravel: Wheeldon; Sibelius: Kraus; Bartók: Straus; Hindemith: Neumeyer); "The Second Viennese School" (Schoenberg: Shaftel; Berg: Headlam; Webern: Clampitt); and "Inherited and Indigenous Traditions" (Villa-Lobos: Tarasti; Prokofiev: Minturn). Volume 2 continues with "Motive, Quotation, and Form" (Shostakovich: McCreless; Britten: Mark); "The European Avant-Garde" (Ligeti: Clendinning; Berio: Hermann; Xenakis: Jones; Sclesi: Drott); and "The String Quartet in America" (Cage: Bernstein; Babbitt: Mead; Carter: Bernard; Powell: Perry; Ran: Peck). The reader will thus find an impressive cross-section of exemplars from a variety of compositional traditions, albeit heavy on the male-dominated canon.

[3] On the whole, *Intimate Voices* is an outstanding example of contemporary scholarship, consciously addressing the multifaceted nature of music analysis as a dialogue between the score, the sound, and the socio-historical context of any particular piece. Each individual contribution tackles these very elements in varying degrees, highlighting the many ways in which they interlace. Some authors single out and target one specific piece—sometimes even a single movement—within a composer's oeuvre, displaying formidable analytical dexterity and ingenuity (e.g., Wheeldon, Kraus, Bernstein). Others take a more historical route, providing a bird's-eye-view of a composer's entire output and situating the string quartet within a broader narrative of his artistic development (e.g., McCreless, Clendinning, Mead, Straus). Still others zero in on a single concept that may run through a composer's career, and illustrate how string quartets served as successive stages in its evolution (e.g., Shaftel, Tarasti, Minturn, Hermann, Jones). Especially interesting in this last group is Shaftel's chapter on

Schoenberg, in which the author focuses on the idea of "comprehensibility" as one of the latter's central compositional goals, tracing it back to his theoretical and pedagogical writings and examining its application in the string quartets. Of particular note is Shaftel's starting point: a set of playing cards painted by Schoenberg himself (a full-color reproduction appears on the front cover of the book's dust-jacket). Here, Shaftel discusses how with just a handful of colors and alterations of shapes, positions, and textures, Schoenberg was able to achieve subtle variations while maintaining overall comprehensibility: characteristics that he was later to employ in his musical works.

[4] To offer detailed summaries of all the chapters in this book would be impractical and most likely uninformative. Instead, I will opt for a close discussion of just one; namely, Jones's own contribution to the collection, an essay on the experience of musical forms in the quartets of Xenakis. Here, the author begins by stating that the experience of the listener, or the esthesic side of music (to use the familiar terminology from Nattiez 1990), was as much a consideration for the composer as the poietic perspective. Jones argues that such a distinction creates an "interesting dialogue" between formal segmentations and the use of pitch-class collections on the one hand, and, on the other, a "special logic" that emerges for the listener. For example, in ST/4, Xenakis's first piece for a string quartet, changes in density from one section to the next take on a form-defining role, but the "perceptually defined" cohesion of the piece does not always coincide with the piece's segments as indicated in the score. This is because Xenakis was concerned with the mean density within each section, not necessarily the *absolute* density at section joints. It is thus possible, as Jones argues, that successive sections are not demarcated with striking changes, while within each section events may line up so as to create divisions that are not part of the compositional design, emerging instead in the esthesic perspective.

[5] While for Jones the "esthesic understanding" of ST/4 develops through formal—perceptual or compositional—junctures of changes in density, in his discussion of Tetora he juxtaposes the work's pitch-class organization with other sonic parameters, and suggests some ways in which the latter supersede the former in arbitrating the listener's experience of structure. Specifically, Jones points to moments when changes in texture and, perhaps even more importantly, meter create opportunities for segmentation that are stronger than changes in scalar content. This again generates friction between poietic and esthesic designs, and provides opportunities for analytical discovery of its sources.

[6] Jones emphasizes in particular the role of musical elements other than pitch in forming what we could call "esthesic form," creating a rich description of each piece's texture, dynamics, articulations, and rhythms. At the same time, he does not shy away from traditional methods of post-tonal analysis; instead, he weaves them into his narrative to highlight points of convergence and divergence with a possible experiential account. Many readers might also enjoy his focus on significant changes in all sonic parameters, not just pitch-class collections, as salient markers to which listeners are likely to attend; these are certainly defining moments in my own experience with these quartets. However, what seems to be missing from the discussion is a broader picture: how do these sectional divisions give rise to form as such? How do they create a perception of cohesion—per Xenakis's own claim—for the listener? This issue raises questions of memory and anticipation, which Jones does not address in his essay, as his focus is centered mainly in the present moment of experience. But as Xenakis himself suggested, his compositions should be heard more than once, in which case one might be able to make an appeal to larger temporal spans of attention. Still, Jones is very careful to make mere suggestions, rather than absolute proclamations, on behalf of the listener. Overall, this kind of analytically informed phenomenological account can serve as an excellent starting point for further empirical investigations of listeners' experiences of contemporary music in general, not just Xenakis's.

[7] The remaining essays in this book are of very high quality, both in terms of historical and analytic content, as well as prose and clarity of examples. However, they vary greatly in density, with some likely to appeal to a more general audience of well-informed music lovers (e.g., Wheeldon, McCreless, Neumeyer), and others probably aimed at readers with a substantial background in post-tonal analytical techniques (e.g., Hermann, Bernard, Clampitt). For example, Straus's chapter on Bartók guides the reader through different stages of the composer's pitch organization—beginning with simple concepts like motives, through harmonies and inversional symmetry, and ending with large-scale harmonic motion and form—with the kind of breezy, transparent, and friendly didactic tone that should be familiar to anyone who studied (and taught) post-tonal analysis at the college level in the last twenty years, the era of Straus's much-used textbook (Straus 2005). On the other hand,

as one would expect, essays dealing with post-war avant-garde and serial composers are far more demanding in terms of prerequisite music-theoretical knowledge. This is probably of little concern to most readers, since it is unlikely that anyone would plow through the entire book cover-to-cover—a practice that, from my own experience, I would strongly discourage in any case. Instead, the collection might best be treated as a reference for a reader interested in a particular composer, since each chapter is largely self-sufficient.

[8] One final word (and this is far less a critique than my own desire): I would like to see this book as an ongoing project, with a future volume or volumes including those composers whose quartets were equally instrumental in shaping the soundscape of the 20th and 21st centuries, but who were given merely an honorable mention in the introduction. I refer particularly to those whose work has remained acutely underrepresented in mainstream scholarship, especially women and those outside of the established Western canon. While it is refreshing to see essays on Ran, Villa-Lobos, or Prokofiev, as Jones himself acknowledges in the introduction, there are countless other examples of quartets largely neglected in analytical literature. Of course, no single source can do justice to the variety and sheer quantity of string quartets written in the last century, and Jones rightly defends his choice of picking "highly respected contributors" and relying on their own preferences for determining which composers to include (xiii). Yet I hope that this project in general opens new avenues for approaching contemporary instances of this long-revered and beloved genre. The essays in this collection definitely set a welcome precedent—and a very high bar—by gracefully weaving historical and social nuance with analytical bravura.

[9] In light of exponential developments in new composition and performance technologies during the 20th century, it is astonishing that the string quartet survived the times, not just as a vestige of an era long gone, but as a thriving medium for composers to develop and express their ideas. As Hermann says at the end of his own contribution to the volume (on Berio):"[the string quartet] might be the only medium from which to do these kinds of studies [of comparing, contrasting, and evaluating compositional techniques and aesthetics] of modernist musics after World War II" (131). This book provides a significant foundational step in that direction.

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Footnotes

1. The Society for Music Theory has itself recognized the volume's significance, awarding Jones a Citation of Special Merit for the book in 2010.
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