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**Edward T. Cone: Hearing and Knowing Music**

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# Introduction

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EDWARD T. CONE WAS one of the most important writers on music of the past century. But he was also unusual in several other respects. In addition to being a writer, he was active as a composer, and always considered himself first and foremost in that light;<sup>1</sup> and he performed frequently as a concert pianist, though usually remaining close to home. He held a prominent position as a member of the Music Department at Princeton University, where following military service during World War II he taught without interruption from 1946 until his retirement in 1985 and remained in close contact until his death in 2004.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, for many Cone is best known for his critical work, though not least for its reflection of his interests as a composer and performer. Princeton was ideally suited to foster his gifts as a writer, for it encouraged its composers to be thinkers as well as active professionals. Two of Cone's Princeton colleagues, Roger Sessions, his former teacher, and Milton Babbitt, his friend and contemporary, are almost as famed for their critical work as for their music. Yet even in this company Cone's writings set him apart. As the author of two influential books, editor of seven others, and creator of over sixty published articles, plus numerous reviews and occasional poems, he enjoyed a uniquely prominent position in the world of musical scholarship.

Although Cone's sizable and varied output helps explain his importance as a writer, his distinctiveness stems especially from the quality of his written output. There simply is no bad or uninteresting work. And Cone occupied a special niche, as he always wrote from the perspective of a practicing musician. He did not participate actively in professional scholarly groups, although he occasionally joined and supported them; and I doubt if he ever submitted a paper for inclusion at a professional meeting. Yet he was often invited to present talks or participate on panels

<sup>1</sup>A catalogue of Cone's compositions, including dates of composition and performance information, as well as reproductions of (at least) the first page of score for each work and movement, has been compiled by Jeffrey Farrington and is available on CD in Adobe Acrobat 7.0 format. For additional information, interested readers should contact [http://music.princeton.edu/The\\_Music\\_of\\_Edward\\_T\\_Cone.pdf](http://music.princeton.edu/The_Music_of_Edward_T_Cone.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Cone himself attended Princeton, receiving his undergraduate and MFA degrees there in 1939 and 1942. Not surprisingly, his name was included in a list of 250 distinguished Princeton graduates recently submitted by the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* to a committee charged with identifying the 25 most influential alumni ever to attend the university.

at such gatherings. For example, he was invited to deliver the keynote address at the 1987 meeting of the Society for Music Theory; and his book *The Composer's Voice* was chosen as the topic of a paper session at the 1988 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, for which he responded to all the contributors.<sup>3</sup>

Cone's independence also stems from the variety of his output. There are carefully argued theoretical and analytical studies (both of his books); considerations of style in individual eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century composers (Bach's Unfinished Fugue in C minor, Inside the Saint's Head: The Music of Berlioz, The Uses of Convention: Stravinsky and His Models); ruminations on opera and operatic characters (The World of Opera and Its Inhabitants); less technical commentaries on musical meaning and criticism (Musical Theory as a Humanistic Discipline); contributions to concert programs (Roger Sessions: Symphony No. 6); consideration of the musical writings of a literary critic (Dashes of Insight: Blackmur as Music Critic); and a personal appreciation of his two famous art-collecting aunts (The Miss Etta Cones, the Steins, and Msieu Matisse). One would be hard pressed to find another musician able to challenge this range.

This variety was consistent with one of Cone's most fundamental tenets: that music should be viewed as part of a larger cultural matrix, not as a specialized topic isolated from other intellectual concerns. This is evident even in the forums in which he published his work, which were often directed toward readers of general, as opposed to specifically musical, interests: books such as *Sound and Poetry*, edited by Northrop Frye, and *The Legacy of R. P. Blackmur*, compiled by Joseph Frank, Edmund Keeley, and Cone himself; and journals such as *Art News*, *Critical Inquiry*, the *Georgia Review*, *Perspectives USA*, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, and the *American Scholar* (where no less than a third of his articles appeared).

Though Cone's work is well known to music scholars, its breadth undoubtedly contributed to his position as an outsider. Indeed, he did not think of himself as a professional musical theorist or musicologist at all, but rather as someone he would probably have called a music critic (though obviously one of a special sort). Nor did he collect disciples or actively pursue fame, activities that would have conflicted with his deeply engrained professional reserve. Cone no doubt welcomed his status as outsider. It allowed him the freedom to write about whatever he wished, and it encouraged him to develop the unruffled, nonpolemical, yet highly

<sup>3</sup>These papers and Cone's responses were published in the *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989): 1–80. Cone's responses are on pp. 75–80.

independent style that characterized all his work.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the variety of Cone's work may help explain his prominence outside the field of music, as well as the importance of nonmusical ideas for his thought even though he scrupulously avoided professional jargon of any kind, whether musical or otherwise.

I was fortunate to have studied with Cone at Princeton both as an undergraduate and graduate student; and I became his friend and remained in touch with him until his death. Along with that of many others, my life and work were profoundly influenced by his example. In consideration of his importance as a writer, plus the fact that so much of his critical work appeared in journals rarely seen by musicians, I brought out a collection of his essays in 1989 to make them more readily available.<sup>5</sup> Thus it was a particular pleasure to learn from Cone's lifetime partner, the philosopher George Pitcher, that he had left behind a sizable body of unpublished material consisting of papers read on various occasions. After looking these over, I became convinced, along with Pitcher, that their quality warranted publication as a book.

Neither Pitcher nor I know when most of these papers were written, or where they were first presented. Only one, "The Irrelevance of Tonality?", refers in its two versions to specific locations: Cornell University and the Lawrenceville School, near Princeton. (This is also the only essay I knew beforehand, having heard Cone read a version of it at Swarthmore College in the late 1970s or early 1980s.) Three of the essays, "The Silent Partner," "Mozart's Deceptions," and "Siegfried at the Dragon's Cave," were essentially in final form, cleanly typed and with detailed footnotes and prepared musical examples. Only one other essay, however, "Schubert's Heine Songs," contained a prepared example, and only a single one previously published in a related article. Though all the remaining essays were also typed, they often had multiple versions; and they contained numerous penciled corrections and occasional suggestions for additional ideas and compositions.

Nevertheless, of the fifteen essays received, only one, evidently written to introduce a performance of the Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto (presumably played by Cone himself), seemed too occasional for inclusion. Even those in rough form were of remarkably high quality and, with minor exceptions, could be easily prepared for publication. As Cone's readers know, he was a consummate prose stylist, which eased

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Fred Maus's remarks on Cone's writing in his excellent introduction to the Cone panel mentioned in note 3 (*College Music Symposium* 29: 2).

<sup>5</sup>*Music: A View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

their preparation considerably. For the most part my contribution was limited to minor adjustments: selecting from multiple versions, inserting missing words and phrases, reordering sections, providing translations, and occasionally adding brief statements for clarification. For some articles I introduced subdivisions through spacing, Roman numerals, or verbal headings (as Cone himself often did); while in others, especially

Stravinsky's *Sense of Form*, I fleshed out graphic formal analyses that were probably intended originally as self-reminders. But in all cases I tried to follow Cone as closely as possible, retaining the content and character of his original text so that he could speak in his own voice.

A few particulars might be mentioned. I have not altered the essays' consistent use of the pronoun *he* to designate persons of either sex, since for Cone and his generation this was the standard and accepted manner of expression. Nor have I attempted to assign dates to the essays. This probably would have proved impossible; but in any event, the essays give little suggestion of chronological progression or development: they are all the fruit of a mature writer and thinker. No doubt those expert in particular areas will find some of the essays dated; but in my view, this does not detract from their quality, and I have made no effort to bring them up to date (for example, by introducing additional citations). The essays stand as they are: authentic representations of Cone's wonderfully individual and effective critical manner.

For the most part, footnotes were supplied without difficulty. When Cone quoted others, he often included citations in parentheses or in margins; and when he did not, a check of standard references was normally all that was needed. Cone also occasionally indicated that a passage from the text should be placed in a footnote, and in a few instances I relocated other material there as well. Finally, in the very few cases where additional explanation seemed necessary, I added footnotes of my own, distinguished from Cone's by being placed in brackets.

The musical examples posed a more difficult problem. Aside from the three finished ones, almost all of the essays deal, often in considerable detail, with musical passages identified by name but not measure number. Though there were frequently copies of score accompanying the essays, these consisted of multiple pages without any additional indications. With the exceptions noted, then, the essays had no prepared examples. (Cone himself no doubt played all of the examples, or portions of them, verbally indicating measure numbers where necessary.) This meant that the precise location of most passages had to be surmised from the text. In the great majority of cases in which Cone did not specify measure numbers, I have inserted them myself, placing them in brackets. (Although I feel reasonably confident that the passages have been correctly identified, I confess that in a few instances they were by no means obvious.) If these numer-

ous indications seem obtrusive, their presence reflects a wish to make the book as user-friendly as possible, especially for those less familiar with particular compositions. But I have reluctantly decided to include only those musical examples Cone prepared himself. This seemed the best solution, given that so many pieces were discussed. To have included all would have created an impractically long book; and deciding which ones to incorporate and where they should begin and end would have required arbitrary decisions. In any event, the works are almost without exception well known and readily available.

There is no doubt that Cone would have made significant alterations if he had published these essays himself—reshaping some passages, compressing others, reworking formulations, and probably adding or deleting entire segments. But not wanting to make these decisions for him, I have kept the essays as much as possible as he left them. And most of the changes I made were sufficiently minimal not to require identification as such.

Taken together, these essays offer an eminently readable collection and provide an impressive sample of Cone's critical work. One will find some surprises, such as the essay on Debussy, a composer Cone addressed only sporadically in his published work. There are also two essays that develop a theory of composition as criticism, an idea close to Cone but one not previously investigated in depth. The essays are equally valuable, however, for the way they enrich—often in unexpected ways—topics addressed at length in Cone's published work, including musical meaning and understanding, the role of memory, operatic versus normal reality, the relationship between temporal and atemporal conceptions of form, and the music of Schubert and Stravinsky. Consistent with all of Cone's work, the essays are elegant yet simple in style; and each is carefully framed to highlight a central point.

As an individual, Cone was engaging and attractive; yet he maintained a somewhat reserved public persona. He was in many respects shy with strangers, and it often took some effort to get to know him well. Yet the payoff was rich. One gained a devoted friend and staunch ally—someone who could be critical yet remain gracious and understanding. He was a natural teacher, possessing passionate beliefs yet always respectful of conflicting ideas. There was never any show in his manner. It did not seem to occur to him to try to impress those around him—even if he invariably did. He imparted his wisdom enthusiastically, yet with grace and humility.

These personal traits are reflected in Cone's writing style. Although he expressed himself beautifully, he did so without pose or any attempt to harangue or cajole. And despite his consummate musicianship, Cone's

technical acumen was offered with a light hand, so that his articles, though theoretically informed, do not seem theoretical. Technical details, even when present, are emphasized not for their own sake but for their critical role in engendering a uniquely musical response something that for Cone was ultimately the only meaningful kind. What was essential in listening to music, then, was the listener's musical experience. One of the essays in this volume, *Hearing and Knowing Music*, which gives it its title, sums up Cone's position perfectly: neither hearing nor knowing is sufficient in isolation, for the two must work in tandem, enriching and strengthening one another. This probably accounts for music's special importance for Cone: it is directly linked to our innermost natures, to the way we hear and the way we think.

Though the present fourteen essays were intended for informal presentation, they are entirely comparable in quality to Cone's published essays (which themselves seem to suggest that they be read out loud). Cone was a gifted lecturer: a master of his materials and deeply committed to communication. By performing his own musical examples, he enlivened his talks, adding greatly to their individuality and their intimacy. These qualities come through clearly in this new collection; and readers who knew Cone should be able to recognize his voice, and perhaps even hear him playing the examples.

I have grouped the articles into four sections on aesthetics, opera and song, composer as critic, and the analysis of individual composers and supplied brief introductions for each. Inevitably, the divisions are partly arbitrary. As always with Cone, the range of topics is great, including such matters as the role of music in culture, the nature of musical hearing, the history of tonality, the relationships between music theater and the real world, connections between composition and criticism, and the character and design of works by individual composers.

Though those familiar with Cone's critical work may recognize occasional overlaps with his published writings, the relationship is in most instances sufficiently minor to require no comment. In two cases, however, I do mention connections in the introductions. Since I also comment there briefly on each of the essays, I can close here simply by asserting that this collection provides an important addition to Cone's published work. It develops his views regarding the different possibilities of musical meaning (symbolic, programmatic, emotional, literal); explores the kinds of compositional insights informed musical commentary can contribute to musical discourse; and, by example, provides an invaluable lesson in the varied uses of music analysis.