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THE TWELVE-TONE METHOD AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION IN ROGER SESSIONS' SYMPHONY NO. 3

by

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ABSTRACT

The Twelve-Tone Method and the Classical Tradition
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Premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on December 6, 1957, Sessions' Third Symphony was the first of his orchestral works to employ twelve-tone procedures. But while expressing the harmonic and melodic vocabulary of a twentieth-century non-tonal composer, Sessions also demonstrates an allegiance to classical tradition by employing classical forms and devices. The first and last movements approach a classic sonata form, the second movement is akin to a minuet or scherzo and trio, while the third consists of a theme and two variations. By integrating twelve-tone principles with traditional procedures, Sessions created a work that not only penetrated the future (of his time) but also paid homage to the past.
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PREFACE

ROGER SESSIONS: AN OVERVIEW

Of composers practicing their art in the United States today, few have had a more profound influence on the course of music here than Roger Huntington Sessions. It has not been a spectacular influence in that it is not often discussed in our more fashionable salons, or written about extensively in our widely circulated journals. But it is a substantial and important influence nonetheless. For it springs directly from the integrity of Sessions as a composer and as a teacher. Sessions is not a composer's composer: his music is too free to fit such a cramped description. But in the validity of his actions and the breadth of his knowledge and experience, he is most certainly a musician's musician.¹

Thus wrote Mark Schubart, then dean of the Juilliard School of Music, in the Musical Quarterly in 1946. Nearly half a century later, these remarks still hold true. A prolific writer, he contributed numerous articles to the prestigious journals of his time, but his own work was not often discussed by other writers. Still, considering the legacy he left behind in the form of prose and music, and the influence and impact he had on his students—many of whom moved on to become eminent composers of their time—his place in American music history cannot be underestimated. John Harbison writes: “Together with Messiaen, Dallapiccola, and Tippett, Sessions helped make the often maligned decade of the 1960s one of the richest in the twentieth century.”²


To gain an insight into his general philosophy, techniques, and inclinations in music composition, I embarked on a study of Roger Sessions’ Third Symphony,\(^3\) chosen because

1) Sessions is generally considered an orchestral composer and the Third Symphony is the longest of his orchestral works. In fact, of his nine symphonies, it is the only other four-movement symphony besides the Second Symphony;

2) It was the first of his nine symphonies to employ twelve-tone principles. Symphony No. 1 (1927) is in E minor while Symphony No. 2 (1946) is in D major and D minor.

A brief overview of Sessions’ symphonic output and their chronological order also suggests that writing the Third Symphony may have “opened the floodgates of a long dammed up orchestral creativity.”\(^4\) His First Symphony, in the key of E minor, was completed in 1927 while the Second Symphony, “representing an excellent example of the intermediate stage between tonality and serialism in Sessions’s music,”\(^5\)

\(^3\) Commissioned for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the Orchestra and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky, the Third Symphony was composed between 1955 and 1957. It was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on December 6, 1957, under the direction of Charles Munch, and subsequently performed at Carnegie Hall on December 11, 1957. The performance of the Third also marked the first time the Boston Symphony had played any of Sessions’ music after a 30-year lapse (between the performance of the First Symphony in 1927 and that of the Third in 1957). This boycott, as it were, was due primarily to the rift between Sessions and Koussevitzky that had resulted over the “unpleasant business surrounding the abortive Boston Symphony premiere of Sessions’s Violin Concerto.” (Olmstead, Roger Sessions and His Music, 112; more details in Olmstead, ed., The Correspondence of Roger Sessions, note 37.)


\(^5\) Andrea Olmstead, Roger Sessions and His Music (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1985), 78.
followed nearly twenty years later in 1946. Another eleven years elapsed before the completion of the Third Symphony in 1957. But the Fourth followed the very next year (1958) and Nos. 5, 6, 7, and 8 were written in 1964, 1966, 1967, and 1968 respectively. The Ninth Symphony, which he began in 1975, was completed in 1978 and premiered by the Syracuse Symphony in 1980.

A Brief Biography

Born in Brooklyn in 1896, Sessions demonstrated musical talent from an early age. His mother recalls the young Sessions' reactions to the "tinny jangle" of a passing hurdy-gurdy:

I have never been able to remember the melody he produced, probably some rattling jig, for the baby claimed our attention. His eyes opened wide, his face grew pink, his hands moved excitedly. Evidently he was listening.

"That child's going to be musical," cried the nurse. "Look at him; he's all stirred up."  

At the age of four Sessions began piano lessons and in the summer of 1909, at twelve, he began writing music. In the fall of 1910 he announced to his parents that he wanted to be a composer and the following year, he began his formal training at Harvard. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard, Sessions proceeded to Yale where he studied composition with Horatio Parker. He also commuted regularly to New York for private lessons with Ernest Bloch. In 1917, upon graduation from Yale with a Bachelor of Music degree, Sessions was appointed a theory

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instructor at Smith College, a post which he held until 1921 when Bloch, then director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, engaged Sessions as his assistant.

Sessions’ accomplishments earned him many awards, several of which took him to Europe between the years 1925 and 1933: two Guggenheim Fellowships (1927–28), the Academy in Rome Fellowship (1928–31), and a Carnegie Fellowship (1931–32). On his return to the United States he held professorships at Princeton, Berkeley, Harvard, and Juilliard. Among his many honors were a Brandeis University Creative Arts Award (1958), the Gold Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1961), a MacDowell Medal (1968), and two Pulitzer Prizes, the first a career award in 1974 and the second for his Concerto for Orchestra in 1982.

Often regarded as an orchestral composer because of his substantial output (nine symphonies, two concertos, Concerto for Orchestra, the Double Concerto, and the Rhapsody for Orchestra) and the facility with which he wrote for this “instrument,” Sessions is said to have “fully refined his use of the orchestra” in his Third Symphony. Here, he demonstrated a preference for

...myriad mixtures from all different families with the percussion as an equal partner, rather than employ[ing] the brass, wind, and string choirs antiphonally in the manner of the “American School.” Tuttis are notable for their wide registers and clarity of individual elements, and solos are set in accompaniments of great variety and subtlety. Instruments tend to play in their best registers and are seldom driven to impersonation or caricature; first violins often soar startlingly high, and unusual solo instruments such as the xylophone or contrabassoon are apt to appear.  

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7 Harbison and Olmstead, 194.
Violins in their highest tessitura, unusual solo instruments such as the xylophone and contrabassoon, and wide registers in the tutti sections—this kind of orchestral writing eventually became Sessions’ chosen medium, employed in orchestral as well as mixed settings such as the opera Montezuma (1963), Sessions’ largest and grandest work both in scale, dramatic content, vocal demands, and orchestral color and eloquence.

In addition to opera and orchestral works, Sessions also contributed to solo and chamber music literature. If his instrumental pieces have been given rare performances, his vocal works have received even less exposure, owing in part to the sheer difficulty of these pieces and to the shortage of published scores and commercial recordings. At the time of writing, only seven of the nine Sessions symphonies have been commercially recorded and released.\(^8\) The forthcoming release of the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies by Decca Records\(^9\) (recorded by the American Composers’ Orchestra) will complete the list of commercially recorded symphonies.

Although his music sometimes suggests the influence of composers such as Dallapiccola (and vice versa), Bloch, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, Sessions retained an individual and consistent style throughout his career despite changes in technical procedures. One of the most notable traits of his music is his keen sense of “line,” and the resultant long phrases that “arch gracefully and participate in a highly complex contrapuntal

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\(^8\) The Louisville Orchestra recorded Symphony No. 7 in the 1980s. The Columbus Symphony, under the direction of Christian Badea, recorded the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies in 1987. CRI released a remastered compact disc of Symphonies 1, 2, and 3 in 1990. The Eighth is available on the Argo label.

\(^9\) This release also includes Symphony No. 7.
texture."\textsuperscript{10} His music is also marked by rhythmic flexibility, achieved by frequent shifts of time signatures and polyrhythms, and colorful orchestration.\textsuperscript{11} The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music describes Sessions' music as "constructively eclectic, drawing on the chief twentieth-century influences but retaining a serious individual stamp."\textsuperscript{12}

It was a seriousness that Harbison calls a "loftiness of purpose." He explains:

The early works were written at three- or four-year intervals, each forming a definitive achievement but also representing steps toward an ultimate goal—the fluent, rich, highly inflected style, luxuriant with free chromatic counterpoint, that crystallized in the late 1950s. In the decade following his opera Montezuma (1963), Sessions suddenly broke loose, writing five symphonies, two grandly conceived choral cantatas, a Double Concerto for violin, cello, and orchestra, three other orchestral works, and remarkable solo works for piano and cello.\textsuperscript{13}

Olmstead observes, however, that "overlap, foreshadowing, and retrogression of style are natural occurrences in Sessions' development," making it difficult to establish clearly defined stylistic boundaries. Still, to view each piece in the context of his compositional career and to note the subtle, gradual shifts in style, his total output of 42 pieces may be divided into six compositional periods, each about a decade apart. The

\textsuperscript{10} Olmstead, Roger Sessions and His Music, xvi.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{13} Harbison and Olmstead, 193.
demarcations often coinciding with changes in his address of occupation."\textsuperscript{14} Olmstead elaborates:

...each period is delineated by a large, often vocal, composition either at its beginning or end. The first period (1910–1923) ends with the Incidental Music to The Black Maskers; the Concerto for Violin (1935) ends the second; the third culminates with The Trial of Lucullus (1947); the fourth ends in 1959, before the completion of Montezuma; the fifth concludes before his Cantata, When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d (1970); and the sixth includes all music written since the Cantata.\textsuperscript{15}

Sessions and the Twelve-Tone System

Sessions had at first been an ardent opponent of the twelve-tone system but he later incorporated it “easily and naturally”\textsuperscript{16} into his writing, maintaining throughout that the procedure was subordinate to the music. Judging from Sessions’ creative output after his adoption of twelve-tone principles, it could be said that “the twelve-tone system freed him (at a fairly advanced age) to write more fluently and quickly.”\textsuperscript{17} Unlike Schoenberg, Webern, or Berg, who adhered more strictly to the twelve-tone set, Sessions thought of the row principally as a reference point. He felt that the composer should be free to use or ignore the row as he/she pleased. The twelve-tone set, he said, gave “shape” to the chromatic scale.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Olmstead, \textit{Roger Sessions and His Music}, 25.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}.


\textsuperscript{17} Olmstead, in a letter to the writer, 25 March 1995.

\textsuperscript{18} George Burt in conversation with the writer, September 1993.
In an interview with Olmstead, Sessions said:

The series is a point of departure for me always. It's certainly organized, but very freely organized, because I don't ever let myself be bamboozled by it...The row is one's own possession; one is not possessed by the row...A row evolves from working out of an original musical idea in which the role of the ear cannot be underestimated, but in the final analysis, organization of a piece of music is in the music itself. \(^{19}\)

Believing that music is more intuitive than intellectual, that it is heard first in the heart rather than conceived by some cerebral or mathematical process, Sessions was understandably opposed to the twelve-tone method, or "system" as he called it. Talking with Olmstead, Sessions remarked: "...all I demand of future analysts, and unfortunately that isn't always met with, is that the principles are here [pointing to his heart] and not here [pointing to his head]." \(^{20}\) He was of the view that theory must always follow, not precede, creative practice, and he felt that in the case of the twelve-tone system theoretical procedure rather than musical impulse had wrongly taken precedence.

According to Alan Douglas Campbell,\(^{21}\) Sessions' initial resistance stemmed from two sources:
1) He felt no inner need for it from the late twenties through the early forties because he was already working with unordered diatonic collections and was able to generate large pieces on this basis;

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\(^{21}\) Alan Douglas Campbell, *Roger Sessions' Adoption of the Twelve-Tone Method* (City University of New York, Ph.D. diss., 1990), 3–4.
2) He considered the twelve-tone method too rigid and he was not convinced that the procedure was rooted in either the basics of human artistic perception or the traditions of Western musical thought.

Andrew Imbrie notes that although Sessions admired Schoenberg’s music and “did not oppose the method on principle,” he felt that such a way of composing “laid undue emphasis on the arrangement of units and cells, at the expense of the larger melodic gesture.” By 1944, however, his attitude toward the “system” seemed to soften. Part of this may be attributed to his increasing contact with members of the Schoenberg circle and with Schoenberg himself, his greater acquaintance with twelve-tone music, his increasing use of chromaticism, and, perhaps, the fact that the more mature twelve-tone works struck him as more artistically and hence, more naturally, conceived. He explains:

I always knew some of Schoenberg’s music very well, but I was not at all sure that Schoenberg’s system, which I didn’t fully understand at that time, could fit my needs. I came to it fairly slowly. When I arrived in California, I had some very good talks with Schoenberg and found out that our ideas were not very far apart.

In one of his own essays on Schoenberg and his use of the twelve-tone method, Sessions elaborates on this change of heart:

... if in some works of the 1920s one feels a certain tenseness and dogmatic insistence, one must regard that as a necessary phase in Schoenberg’s development. At the time he was exploring and

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23 Ibid.

mastering the resources of the new technique. In the works of the last ten years one feels no such limitation. The technique is used with the ease of virtuosity, with complete resourcefulness, and with such freedom that it is sometimes difficult to discover. The Fourth Quartet, the Violin and Piano Concertos are, as far as I can see, his finest achievements of these years, perhaps of his whole work...

They differ first of all in their longer and broader lines. This is not simply a question of "continuity;" Schoenberg has always been in this respect a master of form, and in no work known to me can he be accused of a lack of logic.25

Thus over time Sessions adopted the twelve-tone method, not according to the Schoenberg school but on his own terms. George Burt, who studied with Sessions for five years, both at Berkeley and Princeton, explains that Sessions would develop a row, write it out, and absorb its implications before composing. Sessions points out:

The series will determine the composer's vocabulary; but once the vocabulary has been so determined, the larger questions of tonal organization remain. My own strong feeling is that, while these questions must certainly be answered in terms not alien to the series, it is not serialism as such that can ever be made to account for them.26

Whereas the diatonic scale is involved in the expression of form and structure of a tonal work e.g., in cadential progressions and formulae, Sessions, however, "refused to treat serialism as an abstract form-engendering principle comparable with tonality."27


27 Imbrie, 28.
Lest one should think that his move toward twelve-tone composition was the result of a conscious decision, Sessions points out that his first use of the technique was, at the beginning, quite involuntary. I had at various times... carried out quite small-scale exercises with the technique, but I still envisaged it as not applicable to my own musical ideas. It was therefore a surprise to me when I found the composition of the Sonata [Sonata for Solo Violin] flowing easily and without constraint...28

Referring to these remarks, Elliott Antokoletz notes:

This statement reveals how naturally his increasing chromaticism was transformed into the system without “in any way changing its essential nature.” 29

Symphony No. 3

The initial idea for each movement of this symphony came to him in the fall of 1952 in California while he was working on his second string quartet. He sketched the beginnings of all four movements in one sitting in 1956, eventually revising the first and third, but retaining the second and fourth as written. The work was eventually completed in 1957 and premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on December 6, 1957, under the direction of Charles Munch. Five days later, it was performed at Carnegie Hall. Asked how long it had taken him to write this symphony, Sessions told Olmstead:

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28 Cone, Roger Sessions on Music, 360.

...a long time, because I had all the main ideas of all the movements two or three years before I was even asked to write it. I was working on something else—perhaps on my quartet—in California. And one morning I thought of this first idea of the first movement. I wrote out a sketch for all of this, the beginning of the slow movement, and the beginning of the last movement. And I thought, "Well, that's the next symphony I'm going to write."

...And then when the Boston Symphony asked me to write a symphony in memory of Koussevitsky, that came naturally. Of course, those were only the initial ideas of various movements. I knew what I was going to do. That doesn't happen always. But in that particular case, that did happen. I wrote them all at one sitting. Thought of the whole work...

It was begun probably in '55, a little. I know '55 was the summer I spent in Tanglewood. But I had my Mass on my hands, and I had my Piano Concerto on my hands. I couldn't get started on this till I finished both those things. This I really got going on in the fall of '56, and I didn't finish it till a year later. It's the longest and the biggest of all my symphonies.30

Belonging with a series of works that began with his Second String Quartet of 1951, the symphony was also "the nearest thing to an orthodox symphony that any of my symphonies are."31 Among the other works in this group are the Violin Sonata (1953),32 the *Idyll of Theocritus* (1954), the *Mass for Unison Choir* (1955)33 and the Piano Concerto (1956). Speaking with Edward Downes of *The New York Times* a few days before the symphony's Carnegie Hall performance on December 11, 1957, Sessions

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30 Olmstead, *Conversations*, 33.

31 *Ibid*.

32 This piece is often identified as his first distinctly twelve-tone work. Strong indications of twelve-tone techniques were already evident in his Second String Quartet (1951), the work immediately preceding the Sonata.

33 This piece, though written after he adopted the twelve-tone approach, is not a twelve-tone work and follows a much more diatonic and tonal style. Commissioned by the Kent School (a boys' prep school) and scored for a unison choir, it is what Sessions called "an occasional piece, definitely." (Olmstead, *Roger Sessions and His Music*, 109; taped interview 5 November 1975).
said he considered this group of works to be more lyrical and more personal than his earlier ones.34

Explaining the symphony’s conception and development, Downes adds:

Mr. Sessions said the symphony’s second, lyric theme sprang from a phrase he had in mind for forty years.

During the early, baffling and often dissatisfying days of work on the symphony, the theme grew and expanded. Then one day, he realized that his expanding theme had embraced all twelve chromatic notes of the scale and had become a potential tone-row...Going back analytically over what he had already composed he found that in several places, notably the opening pages, he had used adaptations of serial techniques.

What he had done first by impulse, he now embraced consciously and the last movement of the symphony was composed with perfect awareness of the row and associated devices.

Was it planned that way? Not at first. But when things go well in the composer’s workshop, there seems to be a happy fusion of an all-absorbing expressive drive, a technique that functions below the level of consciousness, and a critical sense as swift as it is instinctive. Above all, Mr. Sessions said, the impulse comes first, in time and importance.35

The “happy fusion” that Downes describes, however, is more than the combined effect of technique and impulse. For Sessions, a twentieth-century composer who continually expressed a respect for tradition and history, this fusion included the integration of a twentieth-century vocabulary i.e., the twelve-tone row, with classical forms and allusions, as seen in Sessions’ Third Symphony. Indeed, it is perhaps this integration of classical principles with the more progressive non-tonal36 vocabulary that

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35 Ibid.

36 Sessions was opposed to the word “atonal,” and it is possible he would not have approved of “non-tonal” either because he felt strongly that pitches had hierarchical relationships to each other even outside the context of the major/minor scale. In his article,
has made this an enduring work, one that “is so concretely and historically embodied” and consequently “capable of universality.”Indeed, in adopting a classical approach, Sessions follows a path similar to Schoenberg’s. Addressing members and guests of the Shepherd Society at Rice University, the Dean of the Shepherd School of Music, Michael Hammond said:

When Schoenberg took the step beyond extended chromaticism of his early works into the method of composing with twelve equal tones (and therefore no tonal center), he eased his way and kept a number of lifelines to the tonal tradition intact. His forms and rhythms remained thoroughly Viennese, following his models, from Mozart through Mahler. Marches, lieder, minuets, scherzos abound and he employed highly dramatic texts, sung or sung-spoken, to give emotional and expressive coherence to a number of works.

Sessions was an ardent admirer of Beethoven, regarding him as “a far greater man than Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, or Euripides, or Goethe.” He made frequent references to Beethoven in his correspondence. In her discussion on Sessions’ Concerto for Orchestra (1981), commissioned by the

“Entr’acte,” he says: “A great deal of confusion, for instance, has been created by the use of the word “atonal” in connection with certain tendencies in contemporary music... Actually there is no such thing as really ‘atonal’ music. The relations between tones are the same as they always have been.” (BSO Program Notes, 480)


38 Ibid.


40 Evident in The Correspondence.
Boston Symphony Orchestra for its hundredth anniversary, Olmstead observes:

This commission...included a performance on a program with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Sessions rarely finishes a commission on time, but in this case the incentive of the program sped up his work.\footnote{Olmstead, \textit{Roger Sessions and His Music}, 176.}

It comes as no surprise, then, to find Sessions employing forms and compositional devices that were part and parcel of Beethoven’s era. Barry Salwen, executive director of the Roger Sessions Society, observes that by working with cells or germ ideas that generate long-range developments (and thus achieve continuity), Sessions demonstrates a close kinship with Beethoven himself.\footnote{Letter to the writer, 7 April 1995. Salwen makes reference to the B-B flat conflict in the “Hammerklavier” sonata (this tension first suggested in the second theme of the first movement—G major against the earlier B flat major—later plays a larger, dramatic role in subsequent movements) and in the “Eroica” Symphony where the C# in m. 7 of the first movement “sets up the longer-range harmonic instability of the first movement of the symphony.”} Salwen adds: “...Sessions considered himself a musical descendent of Beethoven. Beyond loving his music, he drew on technical compositional features of his venerable model.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Consistent with this compositional approach, the study of Sessions’ Third Symphony utilizes both twelve-tone principles and the traditional tools of formal and structural analysis. The objective has been to identify the elements that give this work its strong sense of unity and coherence, the ways in which the composer has employed his row while maintaining a sense of identity as well as integrity with his classical past, and how he puts into practice his primary principles of composition:
1) progression—the ways in which successive impressions of an idea are maintained and intensified;

2) continuity and articulation—the way in which smaller gestures or smaller units group themselves to form larger units until the entire overall design is complete. Sessions maintained that “it is on this basis that contrasts and associative elements are organized and that the continuity of a musical work is achieved;”

3) association—either by nonmusical elements such as text, story-line, physical gestures, or by repetition or variation of musical elements; and

4) contrast—the juxtaposition of opposing forces. Here he points out that even on the largest scale there should only be two basic contrasting groups; “and if three or more elements are present, they must be so organized as to present themselves in two main groups.”

The following chapters of this thesis provide an analysis of each of the four movements of this symphony. They identify the row, the themes, the structure, and the cadential devices, i.e., the ways in which Sessions prepares for points of arrival, for the introduction of new material, and for new structural divisions. This study has endeavored to examine not only Sessions’ approach to twelve-tone composition and how he employs the principle of organic development (characterized by an intense cumulative approach to texture and form) but also the means by which he expresses his allegiance to the classical tradition. All musical examples have been written at concert pitch.


CHAPTER I

THE FIRST MOVEMENT

The processes at work in Sessions’ Third Symphony bear out Elliott Antokoletz’s observation of the “extraordinary degree of interrelatedness between serial content and structure”\(^1\) in Sessions’ music. While the row does not play the same kind of structural role as does the scale in tonal music (\textit{e.g.}, in determining cadence progressions and modulations), it figures prominently as a tool of articulation for shaping cadential gestures and as a thematic resource, helping to unify not only the individual sections of a movement but also the movements with each other. Speaking with the composer, Andrea Olmstead said: “I felt that there were connections among movements of the Third Symphony. They were separated and contrasted, but the original material of the first movement was brought back in each of the other three movements.”\(^2\)

It has been noted that Sessions tended to apply classical procedures. In this work, he expresses his classical allegiance not only in his use of classical forms but also in the presentation of cadences as structural landmarks. While the structural divisions in tonal works are determined by harmonically prepared cadences, in a non-tonal\(^3\) work such as Sessions’


\(^3\) See note 35 in the Preface.
Third Symphony, however, the effect of a cadence results from the sense of resolution or “liquidation” (a word that Sessions favored) created through dynamics, rhythm, or articulation, or by a sense of weight resulting from descending sequences (e.g., in mm. 16–19 of the first movement). Quite often, Sessions introduces a rapid ascent both in register as well as in dynamics to develop tension that eventually demands a resolution. On reaching the climax, a tumbling motion follows, accompanied by a thinning of the texture and a diminuendo, allowing for the tension to dissipate. This downward gesture serves a cadential purpose, taking the music to a sense of repose in preparation for the entrance of contrasting material.

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The first movement, marked Allegro grazioso e con fuoco, consists of three large sections approximating the three sections of the classic sonata form.\(^4\) There are two contrasting themes that are particularly prominent in the first and last sections. These two sections parallel the exposition and recapitulation of the sonata form, while the stormier middle section, containing both new elements as well as variants of already familiar material, functions as the development. (These terms, borrowed from sonata forms,\(^5\) as well as others of “tonal” origin, are used in this study according to their formal role rather than according to any tonal implications, harmonic or otherwise.)

\(^4\) Sessions identified it as such in the Boston Symphony Orchestra Program Notes (6 December 1957): 462.

Section I—Exposition

Ex. 1.1

This first theme (Ex. 1.1) highlights from its outset the significance of the whole-step and its related compound interval, the major ninth. The sighing whole-step figure expands from a confined selection of adjacent pitches to a phrase spanning as much a diminished octave and then a minor ninth. One could perhaps speculate that Sessions regarded the whole step as a focal point of the twelve-tone set employed in this work. An examination of the primary row (see Appendix I) will show two adjacent whole steps between notes 6, 7, and 8.6

A closer examination of the first theme also suggests interlocking whole-tone sub-sets. The first, a tetrachord spanning a tritone, encompasses an ascending sequence: G#, A#, C, and D (see m. 4). The second sub-sets a descending sequence: A, G, F, D#, and C# (mm. 5–8). These sub-sets combine to form an extended series of pitches spanning a minor ninth (Ex. 1.2). The whole-step progression is also underlined in the accompanying parts. The clarinets and the fourth horn play an oscillating whole-step while the English horn traces a whole-step sequence (F-G-B-C#,

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6 The notes in the twelve-tone set have been numbered from 1–12 (instead of 0–11) so as to present their order more clearly. The first note in the set is therefore numbered “1.”
concert pitches, with the A omitted). An interlocking tritone between F and B and between G and C# (Ex. 1.3) further reiterates the whole-step principle.

Ex. 1.2

Ex. 1.3

The half-step serves as a contrasting element to the whole-step sonority of the first eight measures of Theme I. Sessions, having briefly introduced the half-step in the opening measures, then develops upon it with a melodic line that includes a few major sevenths and minor ninths in mm. 9–12, creating an extension of the first theme or a consequent phrase to the opening eight measures. These major seventh leaps stand out not only because of the high tessitura but also because of the ascending line: the first leap from C natural to B natural is followed in the next measure by a leap from F# to E# (major seventh), then G to G#, and finally E natural to C natural (not a half-step relationship) in m. 12. In the larger picture, the interval between the B natural in m. 9 and the C natural climax in m. 12 is also a half-step relationship (a minor ninth).
This consequent phrase (so called because it is not separated from the preceding eight measures by a strong cadence) is initiated by the oboe and violins at mm. 9 and 10, joined later by the flutes and piccolo (Ex. 1.4). While half-step relations are more marked here, the whole-step continues to play an important role as seen in the major second, major third, and tritone intervals in mm. 9–12. As a result of these shared elements, the two melodic ideas illustrated in Ex. 1.1 and 1.4 meld together well and are consequently regarded as constituent parts of the first theme.

Another significant interval is the perfect fourth. Occurring between notes 9 and 10 of the row, the perfect fourth makes its first appearance harmonically at m. 1 of the movement, stated by the B-flat clarinets. At m. 9, it initiates the consequent phrase of the first theme (Ex. 1.4) and continues thereafter to figure prominently in subsequent melodic lines.

What Sessions accomplished within the first twelve measures illustrates the principle of growth or progression. Through motivic repetition and expansion, Sessions ensures a smooth passage from the initial statement of a motive to a more complete line. The opening idea, played by a single instrument, develops from a two-note figure (A# to G#) to a six-note motive in m. 3 and then to an eleven-note phrase at mm. 4
to a six-note motive in m. 3 and then to an eleven-note phrase at mm. 4 and 5. Meanwhile, more instruments are added and at the end of m. 4, three instruments (flute, E-flat clarinet, and first violins) in unison outline the melody to the climax of the last quarter note A in m. 6. The piccolo joins in on the high A and the intensity is maintained for another measure before pulling back a little to prepare for the entrance of the second part of Theme I at m. 9. Sessions thus employs short repeated figures and gradually builds upon them both linearly as well as texturally, demonstrating the principle of continuity and unity.

Just as repeated motives are used to ensure the smooth expansion of thematic ideas, so also are they used to achieve a gradual retreat or dissolution of a segment of music, either to prepare for closure or for the introduction of new material. An example of this occurs at mm. 16–19 (page 12 of the score) where Sessions employs repeated motives or sequences as he thins out the texture and takes the overall musical activity downwards both in dynamics as well as in register from the peak at mm. 14 and 15. The oboes take over from the flutes at m. 17 for a change in timbre.

**Transition (mm 19–27)**

A transition takes place at mm. 19–27, introduced by a six-note figure similar to that found at the end of m. 12, only this time in ascending form (compare Ex. 1.5a and Ex. 1.5b). This six-note figure is brought back a few
times in later parts of the movement in slightly different guises. As a result of its recurrence, it stands out as a significant gesture, employed not only in this movement but in subsequent ones as well.

One of the first cadential progressions in this work is found in the first section, beginning at m. 21 where the flutes and violins dominate. The music tumbles gently downwards until m. 23 where the clarinets, bass clarinet, contrabassoon and lower strings take over, and then to m. 24 where the 'cellos, double bass, horns, and the bass clarinet create a more somber mood and a sense of arrival. At the trough of the descent the dynamic marking is *pp* for the low strings, *ppp* for stopped horns, and *p* for the bass clarinet, resulting in a well-defined sense of retreat. This cadence is prepared by repeated-note gestures in mm. 23 and 24. The following measures (mm. 25–27) contain a sustained chord in the horns, bass clarinet and bassoon against a tranquil first violin line (Ex. 1.6), underscoring this sense of liquidation.
Theme 2 (mm. 28–52)

The second theme, introduced by the oboe, is based on a full statement of P-0, the primary row in its original form (Ex. 1.7; see also Appendix I and II for the row and its inversions).

Whereas the first theme was more rhythmic and motivic, this second theme is more lyrical and is played against a thinner, less busy accompaniment. This procedure can be traced to the classical period. An examination of a Mozart or Beethoven sonata form, for example, will show that historically, second themes have been more transparently presented against thinner accompaniments. What is striking here, however, is the rather smooth integration of two seemingly incongruous elements: a twentieth-century development, the twelve-tone set, with an older compositional tradition.

Segments of the row appear in subsequent measures, either linearly as a consequent phrase to the first full statement of the row, or contrapuntally (a new row segment enters before a previously stated one has been completed) or simultaneously for a more dense texture. At mm. 28 and 29, for instance, the flute plays the first three notes of P-0 two beats after the oboe entrance, enhancing the texture and creating a contrapuntal effect at the same time. At mm. 31 to 34 the first and third horns sound the first eight notes of P-1, beginning just before the oboe completes its full
statement of P-0. The effect is an extension of the thematic line in an inner part with a change in timbre.

As mentioned in the preface, Sessions had a personal approach to the twelve-tone row. He would take segments of the row and combine them to form a longer line or he would begin a phrase with a row segment, then expand the line by other means. He was neither bound by the row nor, to use his own word, "bamboozled" by it. He did not feel compelled to use all twelve notes of the set consistently throughout the piece. Rather, the twelve-note set served as a primary reference point and as a means of unifying the different musical ideas or motives within a movement and between movements.

While differences exist between the first and second themes, they also share some common traits: for example, whole-step motion (which characterized Theme 1) is also present in the second theme. The oboe line at mm. 36 and 37 contains two tritones and several whole-steps between consecutive notes. These same intervals occur elsewhere in the second theme group, particularly in the accompanying parts. By combining familiar ideas with new elements—i.e., the twelve-tone set, introduced for the first time in the form of the second theme—Sessions creates a new theme different enough to be interesting and sufficiently similar to remind the listener of what has gone before. In so doing, he implements the principle of

association, or, in a much narrower sense, repetition. . . . First, through association musical ideas achieve their impact and drive home the precise significance the composer wishes to give them in the mind of the hearer. . . . The single musical impulse is too short,
and too isolated; it is a gesture in the void which has not acquired substance. Only through association can it really become effective.\textsuperscript{7}

\textbf{Closing (mm. 53–56)}

This short section derives its material from the xylophone part at mm. 14 and 15, with the minor/major ninth playing a central role. The presence of this interval, identified earlier as a significant cell in this movement, helps to link this section with previous material. Against a sparse accompaniment, this section conveys a sense of liquidation as dynamics and harmonic and melodic activity are reduced.

\textbf{Section II—Development (mm. 57–86)}

This section is regarded as a development not in the tonal sense (with its associated modulations and harmonic progressions) but in a formal sense because it builds upon previously stated thematic material with modifications in the overall contour (e.g., bass line of mm. 56–60, see Ex. 1.8).

Ex. 1.8

It also employs more elaborate instrumentation, and longer, more complex lines and harmonies, and thicker textures for the most part. At m. 57 the first oboe enters with the first theme material in inversion. Whereas the first theme was initiated at the beginning of the piece by the flutes on a descending whole step, here at m. 57 the oboes introduce it with an ascending whole step. These adjustments coupled with the change in instrumental coloring are an example of the principle of variation that Sessions employs throughout the work. Such changes not only serve to create thematic interest but they also play a structural role. The modifications at mm. 57 to 60 mark the beginning of the middle, developmental section of this movement. Row segmentation, identified earlier in Section I, also occurs in this middle section. But whereas Sessions drew on the original form of the row before, here he includes the inversion of the row. At m. 82, for example, the oboes and B-flat clarinets state the first four notes of PI-6.

It should also be pointed out that the thematic material is recalled at a different transposition, analogous to thematic modulations in tonal works. Unlike the classical sonata form, however, the first theme does not return in its original "key" in the final section. At m. 1, the first theme was initiated by the flute on an A sharp. At m. 57, however, the thematic idea begins on D. Later, in the final section (m. 106), the E-flat clarinet reintroduces the same material starting on F.

Closing (mm. 86–100)

Transitional in character, this part of the movement has increased sixteenth-note activity, developing increased tension and a greater sense of propulsion, leading into the "Retransition."
"Retransition" (mm. 101–105)

The term is used here more because this section functions like a retransition in a sonata structure rather than because of any harmonic implications, hence the quotation marks. The material is derived from transitions in earlier sections. By recalling familiar ideas after a more dramatic, more elaborate middle section, it serves as a link between the “Development” and the “Recapitulation.” At m. 101 and 102 the six-note gesture first found in the transition of Section I (mm. 19–21) returns, preparing for the restatement of primary thematic material.

Section III—Recapitulation (mm. 106–138)

Theme 1 (mm. 106–121)

Again, there is the evidence of progression or cumulation because while the earlier material is retained, its presentation is altered through different instrumentation, different rhythms, and at times, a greater sense of drive towards a cadence. At m. 106, for instance, the recapitulation begins with a change in instrumentation. Whereas the flutes initiated the thematic material at the beginning of the movement, accompanied by clarinets, English horn and strings, here the return of the theme is introduced by the E-flat clarinet against the flutes, horns and strings on the oscillating sixteenths. Segments of the row are also brought into play, e.g., at m. 108 the first clarinet plays notes 7, 8, 9, and 10 of P-8.

Transition (mm. 116–127)

The six-note figure that characterized the transitional passage of Section I appears here also. This six-note gesture is stated twice at
flutes, piccolo, E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinets (when the notes fall within their range), and xylophone (first three notes). At its third occurrence in m. 118, a diminuendo is called for, suggesting a retreat leading to a cadence. Indeed, by mm. 122 to 124, the overall harmony turns more static, consisting primarily of soft trills and repeated notes, and at mm. 125 and 126, the tempo slows with suggestions of quartal harmony resulting from a few vertical fourths (Ex. 1.9).

Ex. 1.9

![Sheet Music](image)

Occurring between notes 9 and 10 of the row, the perfect fourth first appeared harmonically at m. 1 of the movement, stated by the B-flat clarinets. As a constituent interval of the row, it also occurs frequently in melodic lines. But it is particularly prominent in harmonic sections, e.g., at mm. 125 and 126, as mentioned above where it serves a cadential function. The interval also asserts itself in the closing measures of the movement. By placing the harmonic fourth at important cadential points, Sessions expresses a theoretical viewpoint: the stability of the perfect fourth. In his book, *Harmonic Practice*, Sessions says:

> two tones a fifth⁸ [or a perfect fourth] apart will produce the effect of a fifth, and in whatever degree the context permits, will convey a

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⁸ It is probable that Sessions meant “two tones a fourth apart.” Two notes a fifth apart will inevitably produce the effect of a fifth.
sensation similar to that of a root and its fifth, or of a tonic and its dominant.\(^9\)

In a 1965 interview with Edward Cone, Sessions affirmed that he heard all of his music as tonal "in a certain sense" and that tonality involved hearing "relationships between notes."\(^10\) Noting that the perfect fifth is stable (as opposed to the leading-tone principle of the semitone), Campbell adds:

...the unique properties of the semitone and perfect fifth (and their inversions and octave equivalents) were properties to which he [Sessions] was in fact extremely sensitive.\(^11\)

Campbell points out that both interval classes generate the total chromatic collection and that any diatonic collection can be expressed as a cycle of perfect fifths/fourths.\(^12\) The recurring presence of the fourth here and in subsequent movements also indicates its importance as a unifying or associative element.

**Theme 2 (mm. 127–138)**

As in the first section, the second theme here quotes more row forms, mostly extractions (nine-note, seven-note groups etc.) rather than in their entirety. In this section, the second theme is not given as much "play" as in the first section. There are fewer quotations of the row and fewer variations, indicating perhaps a kind of preparation for closure since the recalled material is presented in either shorter phrases or shorter rhythms.

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\(^11\) Campbell, 19.

\(^12\) *Ibid.*
At mm. 127–129, where the second theme returns for the first time in the "Recapitulation" section, for instance, the first oboe states only the first nine notes of P-8, followed by the first flute at mm. 130–131 with the first nine notes of P1-7. The rhythms are also shorter than those found in the second theme of the "Exposition" (compare Ex. 1.10 with Ex. 1.7).

Ex. 1.10

Coda (mm. 139–152)

In preparing for the final cadence to this movement, the texture here is thinner and certain familiar figures or motives are recalled, creating a sense of return. The tempo is also slower, marked *Molto Tranquillo* † = 54. At m. 147 the double bass refers to the row for the last time in this movement with the first four notes of P-11. Following this is a trill on F which slows down to a gently rolling major second (F–G), a reminder of the first theme group which begins in similar fashion with a slow written-out trill. At m. 150 the B-flat clarinets and 'cellos begin a slow trill with augmented note values resulting in a written-out ritard as the movement closes on a single 'cello line.
CHAPTER II

THE SECOND MOVEMENT

A review of the last few measures of Movement I shows how Sessions set the stage for Movement II. The alternating whole-step pattern, first stated in the accompaniment to the first movement's opening measures (Ex. 2.1a), asserts itself in the closing measures (Ex. 2.1b).

Ex. 2.1a (From Movt. I)

Ex. 2.1b (Movt. I.)

Having underscored this whole-step sonority, Sessions carries the same principle into the next movement, beginning with a whole-step sequence:
E-F#-G# played by the oboes and English horn (see Ex. 2.2). The two movements are also related through their use of or reference to the primary row. In Movement II the violins at mm. 12–14 play the first nine notes of PI-0 followed by a reordering of the last three notes of that row at the end of m. 14. At mm. 30–31 the bassoons play notes 6, 7, and 8 of PR-2 followed by notes 3–12 of PR-0. This process of extracting from different transpositions of the row and combining segments from different row levels is found in the first movement also.

**The Recurring Theme**

Initial hearings had suggested a type of rondo because of the insistent, recurring thematic idea (see Ex. 2.2) headed by notes 6, 7, and 8 of PI-7.

Ex. 2.2

But this theme is consistently varied, modified, expanded or transposed at each occurrence. It is also absent in the middle section of the movement. Further examination subsequently indicated a three-part structure, a conclusion confirmed by Sessions in his program notes for the Boston premiere:

The second movement is likewise in three sections—corresponding to the three sections of the classic ‘minuet’ or scherzo. Here again, however, the third section is a variant, not a repetition, of the first. The middle section, or ‘trio,’ is quite simple in conception; it is essentially a dialogue consisting on the one hand of florid and agitated
declamatory passages for violins, over trombones in unison, answered by much quieter phrases (tranquillo) in the woodwinds and horns.\textsuperscript{1}

With a recurring theme that sounds like a parody of “Yankee Doodle,” this movement comes close to being a musical joke. The presence of the snare drum in the percussion part as well as a long drum (or tambourine provençale or military drum, as Sessions says in a footnote on the first page of this movement) help to create a military atmosphere, the sort one might associate with the all-American tune “Yankee Doodle” and, perhaps, toy soldiers.

Not only does this rhythmic, spirited theme contribute to the mood and atmosphere of the movement, but it also helps to define its structural divisions. In a nutshell (and following Sessions’ own analysis), this movement is properly divided simply into A (mm. 1–75), B (mm. 76–120), and A\textsuperscript{1} (mm. 121–183). Sessions expresses his intentions by tempo indications—Allegro un poco ruvido, followed by Più mosso ed appassionato molto, and then a return to Tempo del principio—each tempo change marking an important structural division.

The rhythmic pattern of the theme, first introduced by the oboe and English horn in mm. 1–4, is maintained almost consistently each time the thematic idea is presented. The pitches, intervallic contours, and instrumentation, however, are modified. The opening three notes of the theme (mm. 1–4, Ex. 2.2) are each a whole step apart, tracing a major third. At its next appearance at mm. 20–23 the theme begins on a C# (Ex. 2.3) and the first interval is now a half step followed by a whole step.

\textsuperscript{1} Boston Symphony Orchestra Program Notes, Dec. 6, 1957, 464.
Ex. 2.3

At m. 24 (oboe and clarinet parts) the first two intervals are contracted to consecutive half-steps (Ex. 2.4). The bass clarinet, contrabassoon, 'cellos, and basses follow in *stretto*.

Ex. 2.4

Then in mm. 50–53 the trumpets present the theme with expanded intervals, (Ex. 2.5). The horns, entering the measure before, begin with a contracted interval (compare with Ex. 1.1) followed by a minor third.

Ex. 2.5

Later in mm. 141–143 the theme occurs in inversion (Ex. 2.6),

Ex. 2.6
in octaves (mm.161–163, xylophone), and in augmented fourths (mm. 170–173, horns, Ex. 2.7).

Ex. 2.7

These transformations impart a sense of growth and development: by varying the intervallic contours, by employing contrapuntal devices (as he does with the horns and trumpets at mm. 50–53), and by changing the texture, Sessions keeps this theme alive and pulsating without ever becoming monotonous or hypnotic. To further ensure that this insistent theme does not lose its impact, Sessions suspends it in two instances: for a brief time from mm. 35 to 50 (although the rhythmic pattern of the theme can be found in the woodwinds at mm. 35 and 36) and then for a significantly longer spell from mm. 76–120. In its place, contrasting material is presented, which helps to develop musical interest and also prepares for an incisive return of the theme.

Section A

Part I (mm. 1–33)

As mentioned before, the principal theme in this movement is the “Yankee Doodle” parody (Ex. 2.2), first introduced by the oboe and English horn at mm. 1–4 and then by the oboe and trumpets at mm. 20–23. The change in instrumentation as well as intervallic modifications give the
theme a different "color," thus adding to the interest and development of the theme.

Contributing to the idea of development and growth is the introduction of a repeated eighth-note pattern played by first flute and xylophone in counterpoint to the theme at mm. 20–23. The repeated pattern on its own already creates a sense of excitement. In combination with the spirited theme, the level of interest and forward motion is enhanced. It should be noted that this repeated pattern is not a totally new idea either, having already been introduced in the first movement (see Movt. I, mm. 28–39, viola part), demonstrating again the association of musical elements between movements. Within this movement, preparation for the repeated sequence in mm. 20–23 can be traced back to mm. 12–15 where the woodwinds and brass introduce a sequence of repeated eighth-notes (Ex. 2.8).

Ex. 2.8
Dynamic and textural growth also contribute to the sense of cumulation. The music builds to a \( ff \) climax at m. 25. Meanwhile, more instrumental parts become involved in playing some form of the theme (see especially mm. 24–26). A diminuendo follows at m. 26 and, as illustrated earlier in Chapter I, Sessions marks the approaching cadence with thinner texture, lower registers, and reduced dynamics. The music comes to a pause at m. 33 and the meter changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at m. 34, accompanied by a \textit{tutti} gesture of sixteenths, suggesting a structural upbeat to the next section.

Part II (mm. 34–50)

Contrasting material is introduced here but it can be traced back to ideas found in Movement I and in preceding phrases of this movement. This part of Section A focuses on leaps of sevenths and ninths as well as major and minor seconds. The main theme of this movement consists largely of linear major and minor second motion, which, when expanded, result in major/minor sevenths or ninths. Once again, the new and the familiar are juxtaposed or combined. Rhythmic patterns akin to that of the theme can also be identified, e.g., in the woodwinds at mm. 35 and 36.

At mm. 43 and 44 the English horn (and at mm. 46 and 47 the flutes) plays two sets of trills that are later expanded and used in the opening measures of Movement IV. These trills could also be described as embellishment half-steps, an important interval in the entire symphony.

Part III mm. 50–75

In giving the theme to the horns and trumpets, and then introducing a seemingly new idea (Ex. 2.9) in the higher register instruments (flutes,
piccolo, oboe, E-flat clarinet, and xylophone) in counterpoint to it, Sessions turns the thematic material into an accompaniment (see especially the horns at mm. 54–57, and oboes, clarinets and English horn at mm. 57 and 58).

Ex. 2.9

\[\text{Music staff image}\]

This "new" material, however, is actually a derivative of the first theme of Movement I, partly inverted with octave displacement (compare Ex. 2.9 with Ex. 2.10).

Ex. 2.10 (from Movt. I)

\[\text{Music staff image}\]

The descending triplet-quarter note figure introduced in the new melodic material becomes a group of sextuplets (first three notes ascending, second three descending) in mm. 59 and 60. The compression of note values combined with the larger dynamic markings (\textit{ff} at m. 59) add to the sense of urgency. Again, we see how a more complex idea can be traced to simpler origins. It is evident that while Sessions maintained that music was more "heart" than "head," he was also very particular about detail and "preparation."\(^2\)

\[\text{Footnote}\]

\(^2\) George Burt points out that Sessions placed considerable emphasis on preparation, particularly in the sense of direction, \textit{i.e.}, leading from one note or one passage into the next.
At m. 59 the climax and accumulated tension call for release and dissolution. Sessions accomplishes this with reduced dynamics and generally shorter phrases. The eighth-note sextuplets which spanned as much as a tenth (measured between the highest and lowest note in the group, Ex. 2.11) in several instances are reduced to oscillating whole steps at mm. 61 and 62 (clarinets), suggesting more subdued energy levels.

Ex. 2.11

The texture thins out slightly, and at mm. 64–67 the lower-register instruments (bass clarinet, bassoon, and double bass) take over in preparation for the cadence. At mm. 65–68 the repeated-note patterns that
were identified at mm. 12–15 and mm. 20–24 take on a bigger role, this time as a cadential gesture. Here again, the repeated notes (found in the bassoons and bass clarinet parts) are played in counterpoint to the main theme played by the bass (mm. 65–67) as well as in the first and third horns (mm. 67–71). As noted before, Sessions' cadences tend to favor the lower register instruments (although he does not confine his cadential patterns to descending bass patterns). One possible explanation for this is that Sessions regarded cadences as "an accent of weight," and lower instruments contribute to that perception. While accompanying parts move downwards, thematic activity is also taken lower as Sessions implements the downward cadential gesture that he used to great effect in the first movement. The bass states P-7 (with some omitted notes) at mm. 71–74 as muted horns which played the main theme earlier, bow out. A brief sense of release and dissolution ensues. This calm is interrupted by the bold chords at mm. 74 and 75, which function as structural upbeats leading into the next section.

Section B (mm. 76–113)

This section consists of an alternation of polyphonic/contrapuntal passages and homophonic passages. The homophonic transitions Sessions uses in Movement III seem to have their roots in this part of Movement II. The homophonic sections in both movements are marked by metrical changes. In this movement all the interspersed homophonic segments of Section B are in 3/2 while the transitions of Movement III are in 4/4 time.

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3 Burt, in discussion with the writer.
Marked *Più mosso ed appassionato molto*, this section begins boldly with the violins at m. 76 (Ex. 2.12). Sessions calls for *quasi recitativo ma molto appassionato* here which makes the *Tranquillo* that follows all the more effective. This is not the first time that Sessions has ordered an abrupt change in mood. At mm. 74 and 75 emphatic chords come immediately after two measures of a solo bass line marked *pp*, and it would appear that even this gesture is a kind of preparation for the sudden alternations between *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* that become part of the character of the second section.

Ex. 2.12

Following a four-measure homophonic passage from mm. 82–85, the thematic material returns at m. 86, this time with increased intensity. The violins are joined by flutes and the dynamic level is taken up to *fff*. Adding to the tension are the first and third horns and trombones (from m. 88) which initiate a six-note pattern (quarter-note values) derived from the first theme of Movement I and its interlocking whole-tone subsets (Ex. 2.13). Mm. 86–93 stand out as a climactic moment in this movement, underscored by bold dynamics, thick texture, and heightened intensity.

Ex. 2.13
Just as the thematic materials grow and intensify, so also do the homophonic linking passages. With each appearance in this section, the homophonic idea is enlarged or extended. The first homophonic passage is only four measures long, the second is six-measures long from mm. 94–99 with several metrical changes along the way, all contributing to the fluidity of the melodic line. At m. 97 the first clarinet plays a melodic line that suggests the secondary row found in Movement III.

The third connecting passage (mm. 106–114) in this section, following a thematic passage that is more intense than its predecessor, demonstrates more growth and cumulation. Its overall character is still *Tranquillo* but the *animando* indication at m. 108 suggests a slight increase in energy. After two chordal measures in 3/2 time the E-flat clarinet initiates an extended melodic line at m. 109 (Ex. 2.14) that contributes to a sense of increased breadth.

Ex. 2.14

Section B of this movement comes to a close at m. 113, cadencing with a similar downward gesture of weight followed by an easing off or decay of energy. The bass makes its entrance at m. 112 (after several measures of rest), the texture thins out, and the dynamic level drops to *ppp*, creating a feeling of arrival and an anticipation of change. But as with many of the connecting passages in this movement, the break is momentary and the
change of direction abrupt. The pace picks up almost immediately at m. 114 as the tempo switches from *Tranquillo* to the livelier *Tempo I*.

**Section A¹ or Final Section (mm. 114–180)**

The first eight measures preceding the return of the main theme (mm. 114–121) may be regarded as a large structural upbeat leading to the return of parody on "Yankee Doodle." The *Tempo I* indication seems to associate these measures with returning material. Mm. 114–121 lead aurally into the return of the main thematic idea.

This passage has a significant number of upward gestures and motives, there is a sense of progression, and the overall effect is more uplifting than weighty. The principal theme returns on the last two beats of m. 114, and as in Section A, it appears in different guises at various junctures of this section, alternating with other homophonic material, derived from the first section.

Compared with the first section, however, this final one is more compact—the principal theme plays a more insistent role, either fragmented or complete, and episodic or linking sections between thematic entries are shorter. Whereas the first section was more readily divided into three rather distinct parts, this final section seems to be more tightly knit, and dividing lines between its constituent parts, if they exist, are more blurred. What is more significant in this section is the sense of drive, the cumulative energy that the recurring theme seems to represent, and its insistent demand for attention. Evidence of this focus can be found in mm. 136–141 especially. It is analogous to mm. 51–57 in that the two passages play the theme with expanded intervals. But whereas the earlier
passage introduces a secondary melody played above the principal theme or its derivative, in this later section the theme draws attention solely to itself.

At mm. 145–158 a transitional passage is introduced, preceded by a gesture similar to that found at m. 34 as well as in the transitional ideas of Movement I. But while the earlier occurrence of the sweeping gesture served more as a structural upbeat to a new section, this later appearance at m. 144 functions more as an internal cadential gesture (because of its rapid downward sweep and the general calm that follows). This transition at mm. 145–158 may also be regarded as an episodic segment because it serves as a link between an earlier thematic statement (bassoon part at mm. 141–143, inversion of the recurring theme) and a new statement of the theme by the trombones at m. 159. The motives employed at mm. 157–58 consist of repeated eighth-note dyads (oboes and B-flat clarinets, which have the principal voice, are in unison), rhythmically similar to the repeated-note patterns of mm. 12–15 (woodwind and brass) and mm. 20–25 (first flute and xylophone). This idea is then enlarged into an accompaniment (woodwinds at m. 160 and strings at mm. 161–162) as the theme returns in *stretto*, stated first by trombones, then horns, and later xylophones. This repeated-note sequence, which first appears as a principal figure marked by bold brackets and then evolves into an accompaniment, can also be found later in Movement III (m. 81, flutes and vibraphone part), once again demonstrating the unity of musical elements employed throughout the symphony.

The return to the principal theme is marked by a rapid progression both in dynamics and texture. The principal theme is played first by trombones, followed by horns, and then the xylophone in octaves. The
resulting *stretto* effect increases the tension and intensity of the moment. But at mm. 168–170, a release ensues as the energy dissolves and once again, we see the downward cadential gesture bringing with it a sense of closure.

**Coda (mm. 170–183)**

A coda follows with the thematic material played in augmented fourths by the horns (mm. 170–173, see Ex. 2.7). The dynamic indications of *pp* and *da lontano* help to underscore the effect of retreat. From mm. 178–180 a solo bass creates a feeling of repose as it plays the familiar oscillating whole-step (G-F), reminiscent of the final measures of Movement I. The flutes follow with two consecutive seventh leaps: the first from B natural to B flat and the second from the B flat to the A flat an octave higher (mm. 181–183). In so doing, they highlight the half-step–whole-step relationship in expanded form, *i.e.*, as minor and major sevenths instead of seconds. With this gesture, the link between the first and second movements is further reinforced.
CHAPTER III

THE THIRD MOVEMENT

Marked *Andante sostenuto e con affetto*, the third movement is elegiac¹ and possesses a profound² sense of yearning. Coming after a bold first movement and a spirited second movement, this movement provides the kind of contrast that perhaps makes it a focal point in the entire four-movement work, not only because of its poignant character but also because of the growth and development of twelve-tone processes and musical ideas, which Sessions demonstrates most vividly through the framework of a theme and two variations.

An important instance of growth is found in his thematic resource for this movement. Rather than rely on the primary row (first introduced as the second theme in Movement I) for thematic ideas, Sessions develops a secondary set of twelve pitches that are different yet quite clearly an outgrowth or a derivative of the primary set.

First of all, the contour of the first three notes of the primary row and the secondary row can be found mirrored in the last three notes of their respective row forms (Ex. 3.1). As a series of interval relationships (according to the smallest number of semitones between consecutive

¹ In Olmstead, *Conversations* (p. 31), Sessions reveals: “The place where Koussevitsky is buried is in the courtyard of a little church at the top of a hill in Lenox. ...I thought of the third movement up there.”

² Harbison describes it as one of the “most profound” of Sessions’ slow movements. (*The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, vol. 4:194).
notes), the primary row (P-0) can be represented as 1-3-4-4-1-2-2-1-5-3-1. The first and last two intervals are mirror images of each other. The secondary row (S-0) can be represented as 3-2-4-2-4-3-2-4-6-2-3. The first and last two intervals of each row are mirror images of each other.

Ex. 3.1

Another relationship between the two rows can be found by comparing the last three notes of the inverted primary row with the first three notes of the secondary row. Both three-note sets follow a similar contour—order numbers 9, 10, 11 of the inverted primary row are a minor third (three semitones) up, minor second (two semitones) down while the first three notes of the secondary row are a minor third up, major second down (Ex. 3.2). The intervals are not identical but their intervallic contour is clearly similar.

Ex. 3.2

This idea of association by similarity of intervallic contours was prominently displayed in Movement II—the actual intervals of the
recurring theme were continually modified but the overall contour and rhythmic structure were retained. It should be noted also that intervallic expansion or contraction (while maintaining a similar contour) played a significant variational role in many of Sessions’ works.

**Theme 1 (mm. 1–43)**

**Principal theme mm. 1–15**

The first clarinet states the principal theme, which is based on a complete statement of the row (S-0), while the harp provides an accompaniment (made up largely of a series of half-steps and whole steps as well as seventh leaps) growing out of the last three-note partition of the secondary set (see Ex. 3.2), or, more specifically, the last three notes of S-3, A-G-B flat. Closer examination reveals a gradually changing harmonic support. Ex. 3.3 presents the harp accompaniment, highlighting the notes that mark the harmonic change. The harmonic rhythm accelerates (*i.e.*, changes occur more frequently) from mm. 4–6. Against the sustained opening note of the first theme (mm. 1 and 2), the harp part remains harmonically static, based primarily on an A-G-A-B flat sequence. But just before the clarinet moves from the opening D to its next pitch (F, the last sixteenth note in m. 2), the bass line in the harp part progresses to A flat and retains that A-flat bass support through the next measure (mm. 1–3).

Ex. 3.3
The structure of the accompanying harp part is, to a large extent, an elaboration of the second-seventh relationship already established in the first two movements. It also ensures a smooth link from the preceding movement which ends on a sequence of major seventh to minor seventh leaps (mm. 180–183 of Movt. II). A similar connection is also established between the closing measures of the first movement, consisting of an oscillating whole-tone pattern, and the onset of the second movement which begins with a whole-tone pattern.

The material for the harp part is presented both at the introduction of thematic ideas as well as at cadential junctures. At mm. 10–15, for example, the harp line conveys a sense of rest as it moves from generally larger gestures to smaller intervals and finally to a unison B#–C repetition just before the chordal passage beginning at m. 16 (Ex. 3.4).

At mm. 7–10 a contrapuntal linking passage follows the opening clarinet theme, consisting of segments of the inversion of the row, preparing for the next thematic entry at m. 11. Against the harp accompaniment illustrated above, the bassoon provides an extension to the principal
thematic idea as it quotes a complete SR-3 (with two pitches—B and E flat—interchanged) from mm. 11–14 while the ‘cellos state notes 6, 7, 8, and 9 of SR-7 in counterpoint.

**Transition (mm. 16–20)**

Muted trombones and bass clarinet, joined later by horns, present this transitional homophonic passage. Similar homophonic writing can also be found in Movement I, mm. 125–126 and in the *Tranquillo* sections of Movement II. The chordal texture draws attention to itself not only because it presents familiar elements found in an earlier movement but also because it marks a change from the contrapuntal writing seen so far in this movement. The lower tessitura of the instrumentation in this section also renders the harmonies less readily identifiable. Effect more than the clarity of pitches seems to be the focus here.

**Theme 1b (mm. 20–34)**

A secondary theme (Ex. 3.5) consisting of segments of the retrograde and inverted forms of the row, is introduced here by the first violins and ‘cellos. This secondary idea has already been suggested contrapuntally from mm. 7–10 and then from mm. 11–14 by the bassoons. At mm. 20–25, however, the violins develop this secondary idea into a longer line. The importance of this violin line is further underscored by the use of bold-face brackets that Schoenberg first introduced in his music to indicate the *Haupstimme* (or principal voice).

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3 In his program notes for the premiere, Sessions wrote the two contrasting themes (identified as Part I and Part II in this study) are “connected by a passage given at first to muted trombones.” This connective section “assumes each time a different character and greater importance in the two variations that follow.” (BSO program notes, 6 December 1957, 464).
At m. 25 the addition of the woodwinds and brass results in a denser texture while the augmentation of note values (see Ex. 3.6) creates a sense of retardation in preparation for the closing section that follows.

Closing Section (mm. 26–43)

The calmer character coupled with the thinner texture and the use of row segments suggest imminent closure. A bold sweeping gesture at mm. 33–34 is then followed by a large downward progression at mm. 35-43, marking the conclusion of the Theme. The coda is indicated not only by the return to the 4/4 meter (after the preceding 5/4 cadential measure) but also by a change in texture and musical content. The held-over D in the violin part at m. 35 is significant, suggesting that this passage is a part of the
is a part of the overall closing section. Sustaining the violin line across two sub-divisions underscores this relationship.

**Variation I (mm. 44–83)**

This variation is more developmental in character and marked by increased activity, more intense drama, and a well-developed climax.

**Principal theme (mm. 44–54)**

The first clarinets state a fragment of the principal theme consisting of the first four notes of S-0 at mm. 45-47 against an accompaniment by harp, second and fourth horns (now *senza sordino* but still *pp*), and bass clarinet. Following soon after, the flutes give a complete statement of S-0. In this variation, progression is clearly more important than the re-statement of a musical idea, which perhaps accounts for the absence of more row forms. Energy and drama are reinforced by bolder dynamic shading. As in the Theme, the harp once more serves both a supporting as well as a structural role. Mm. 51–54, analogous to mm. 10–15 in the Theme, similarly prepare for the entrance of the chordal transition (Ex. 3.7).

**Ex. 3.7**

![Musical notation image]

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[Image 0x0 to 588x772]
Transition (mm. 55–62)

This passage is analogous to mm. 16–20, but longer and more elaborate, with a change in instrumentation. While mm. 16–20 are played by clarinets, first, second, and third trombones, and the long drum (muffled), with the horns joining in at m. 18, the transition here has flutes, first bassoon, and more prominent horns, joined later by the bass clarinet, first oboe, and English horn. The texture is dense but there is greater harmonic clarity here (than in the Theme), resulting from the higher tessitura of the passage and the use of mid-range horns instead of low trombones.

Secondary theme (mm. 63–67)

Analogous to mm. 20–25, this section recalls the secondary theme as it begins with a partial statement of SR-11. As in the corresponding passage of the Theme, there is a rapid crescendo followed soon after by an almost abrupt change in texture and dynamics. Measure 67 is comparable to m. 25 which marked the end of the secondary thematic idea and the beginning of the closing section. Here, however, the note values are not augmented and there is less of a retardation. Instead, the cadence is created more by articulation—the last three eighth notes in the measure are written over a diminuendo (from \textit{mf}) and the breath mark that follows at the end of m. 67. At the same time, Sessions calls for \textit{poco animando}, indicating that energy levels should be sustained a little longer. Further, since variations are generally more elaborate and often more dramatic than their themes, the \textit{poco animando} indication helps to prepare for the climactic progression that follows. In the Theme, the secondary theme was followed
by an extended contrapuntal section without any significant increase in drama.

Closing Section (mm. 68–83)

The calm of mm. 68–72 serves as a preparation for the subsequent build-up in tension, drama, dynamics, and texture. Analogous to mm. 26–30 and similar to it in character at least in the first few measures, this section (mm. 68–72) starts out relatively thin. A strong sense of propulsion is created from m. 73 onwards as dynamics increase and the texture thickens. Triplet sixteenths in the brasses and the poco animando marking add to the feeling of urgency and tension. When the trumpets enter at m. 78 on a triple forte, the sense of “cumulation”\(^4\) intensifies.

The repeated sixteenths and tremolo triplet motives in the horns and trumpets (from mm. 73–80) add to the increased urgency and tension. Sessions also calls for poco animando and più animando at mm. 75 and 76 followed by an increase in tempo: Animato \(\frac{\text{d}}{\text{s}}=88\) compared with the original tempo of \(\frac{\text{d}}{\text{s}}=66\). The climax is reached at m. 79 and a general liquidation of activity ensues.

Coda (mm. 80–83)

The energy and tension accumulated in the preceding few measures gradually dissolves, aided by the poco a poco calando indication, thinner texture, and shorter phrases. At m. 81 the flutes, vibraphone, and harp

\(^4\) To Sessions, progression and cumulation were synonymous. He said: “Since music is an art of time and not space, its effect must be cumulative and not static. Successive impressions must either maintain the level of intensity, of interest, of movement established at the outset, or they must raise it. Otherwise, in somewhat primitive terms, the tension relaxes, the ear becomes bored, and the music lags.” (The Musical Experience, 62)
play an alternating figure, recalling a similar gesture found in mm. 157–160 in Movement II. The tempo returns to Tempo I' at m. 84 to prepare for the onset of Variation II.

Variation II (mm. 84–112)

Principal theme (mm. 84–96)

This variation begins with a reference to the principal theme (based on S-0) but this time the row is only partly quoted with some pitches restated. The first bassoon and English horn begin with a statement of the first four notes of S-O at m. 85, with the bass clarinet adding some bass support at mm. 87 and 88. The texture is thicker and busier from the outset. The tempo indication is Più mosso subito, creating an undercurrent of intensity from the start. At mm. 92–93 a descending gesture anticipates a point of arrival, followed by a thinning of the texture. Second violins play a whole-step figure, reminiscent of the main theme in the first movement.

One major difference between this variation and the preceding two parts (i.e., the Theme and Variation I) is the change in the accompanying parts. Whereas previously the harp alone provided the main accompaniment, here trombones, divided 'cellos, as well as the harp provide the support, creating a generally heavier bass. At m. 90 the thematic material is developed in less dramatic fashion than in Variation I. Whereas the preparation to the climax was more extended in Variation I, the high point here is swiftly reached, followed soon after by a marked ritard. and a significantly thinner texture.
Closing Section (mm. 97–112)

With the return to Tempo I at mm. 97, preparation for closure begins. Sessions also calls for *molto tranquillo* which further indicates a sense of repose. Melodic interest is shared among flute, oboe, and B-flat clarinet. Their parts, imitative in some respects, dovetail almost seamlessly into each other (Sessions marks *continuando*) to create an extended melodic line from mm. 97–106. It is possible that Sessions was thinking of Webern’s *Klangfarbenmelodie*. But, considering his allegiance to the classics and his affinity for history and tradition, it is more likely that Sessions was thinking of an earlier era and an earlier work, where different instruments shared segments of the larger melodic line (*i.e.*, Beethoven’s *Eroica*, Ex. 3.8).

Ex. 3.8, from Beethoven’s *Eroica*, Movt. I, mm. 45–54

*all parts at concert pitch*
At mm. 103–106 the English horn recalls theme 1 based on S-0 just before the entrance of a brief homophonic passage identical to that which divided theme 1 from theme 2 in both the Theme and the first variation. These chords at mm. 107-108 serve as a harmonic preparation for the return of the secondary theme, based on the retrograde of the row.

**Secondary theme mm. 107–112**

The first violins enter at the end of m. 108 (based on SR-11 with some reordering and omitted notes), recalling the secondary theme, played earlier in the Theme by 'cellos and violins at mm. 21–25. At m. 111 the *poco rall.* and softer dynamic indications prepare for the coda which closes the entire movement.

**Coda (mm. 113–120)**

The movement ends as it began with the B-flat clarinet stating theme 1 (based on S-0) in full, accompanied by harp and horns. The harmonic shading, however, is slightly different from that found in the Theme. The direction of the leaps in the harp part is also altered. At the beginning of the movement, the harp plays sequences that tend to be fairly balanced between the treble and bass clefs. In the coda, however, the supporting bass notes show a greater downward tendency, evident especially from mm. 114 onwards (Ex. 3.9). The movement closes on a descending minor seventh.
CHAPTER IV

THE FOURTH MOVEMENT

The fact that the fourth movement was composed with "perfect awareness of the row and associated devices"\(^1\) demonstrates not only Sessions’ increased acceptance of the twelve-tone principle but, quite naturally and perhaps more importantly, his absorption with the work and its basic thematic and motivic ideas. Motives, gestures, and intervallic and rhythmic patterns that figured prominently in the preceding three movements are brought back in this final movement, sometimes conspicuously, sometimes more veiled. As is often the case in final movements, the energy and tension levels are taken to their peak here, with an almost unabated sense of drive and direction. With its tempo indication of *Allegro con fuoco* (\( \text{\textnotes{\text{\textfrac{\textit{\textdegree}}{116}}}} \)), this movement progresses at a fiery pace. But there are moments of release, and these welcome changes serve not only to provide contrast but also to prepare for fresh phases of renewed vigor.

This movement sees a return to the primary twelve-tone set as the main point of reference. First unveiled as the second lyric theme in the first movement, the row now serves several functions: motivic, thematic, and structural. But most significant of these, perhaps, is its cadential role, especially at the end of the work (mm. 327–330, Ex. 4.1). These last four

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measures find the full orchestra (excluding the harp) playing the complete primary row in unison. There is an emphatic drive (marked by accents and sforzandi) toward the final note and the rhythm is organized in such a way that a kind of dominant-tonic cadence results.

Ex. 4.1

Sessions remarks:

Cross my heart and hope to die, not until the very end did I realize that it ends on a sort of tonic and dominant, dominant and tonic... Not that the tonic has been prepared tonally at all but that's the way the symphony ends. You have A flat and D flat in the timpani and trombones, and so you have a descending fifth at the end. That was not a joke exactly, but it was fun.²

Using the primary row in retrograde in cadential passages was common practice with Sessions (see, for example, the closing measures of his Sonata for Violin, Symphony No. 7, and the cantata When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd) but here he uses the original form of the row. Olmstead points out that retrograde endings were a "typical feature of Sessions's twelve-tone writing."³ She adds that these kinds of endings are "so distinctive that I call them 'Sessions endings.'"⁴ The absence of a

² Olmstead, Conversations, 32.

³ Olmstead, Roger Sessions and His Music, 116.
retrograde ending here is, therefore, unusual, but perhaps logical as well, considering the structure of the row and how Sessions finally closes with a dominant-tonic cadence.

The structure of this movement is similar to that found in the middle section of the second movement: active, forward-moving sections alternate with quieter, generally tranquil passages. As in the second movement, each renewed spurt of energy brings with it evidence of progression, growth, and variation. Unlike the previous movements, however, this final movement endeavors to keep the underlying energy pulsating all the way to the end. Whereas the earlier movements saw a retreat and liquidation of texture in their closing measures, this final movement closes on a surprising but no less convincing perfect (in the tonal sense) cadence.

According to Sessions’ program notes,

The final movement is built of five sections, separated clearly by quiet and relatively static passages, in which various orchestral colors are played off against each other, and the persistent recurrence of short motifs, of sometimes purely rhythmic character, maintains the pulsation. Once again variation is the guiding principle; the third and fourth sections are extended variations of the first and second respectively. Each of the two main sections contains a number of elements proper to itself. The final section is a kind of “coda” which brings back in summary form the various elements of the opening section.⁵

To illustrate the relationships among the five sections of this movement and to help highlight the two main sections and their

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⁵ Boston Symphony Orchestra, Program Notes, Dec. 6, 1957, 465–466.
corresponding variations, the letters A and B have been used instead of Roman numerals.

Section A (mm. 1–54)

One of the most distinct elements in this movement are the trills that not only play a secondary, accompanying role, but also a structural one. In the larger scheme of things, these repeated trills, occurring at each return of A material, serve as the pillars upon which this movement is constructed. These trills are found at the very beginning (mm. 1–6), then again at the start of Section A₁ from mm. 115–120, and finally, at mm. 294–299, marking the onset of Section A₂. There is no mistaking their somewhat “recapitulatory” function because the measures following each trilled entry bring back familiar motives and gestures. In fact, it was with the aid of these “trill signals” that the larger structure of this movement was eventually heard and perceived.

Of particular significance is the fact that these trills are at the half-step. As mentioned earlier in connection with preceding movements, the half step is one of the basic cells in this entire work, its importance due largely to its role within the primary row itself: the first and last intervals in the row are half steps. The use of the half-step here thus helps not only to highlight the row but also to relate this movement to the rest of the work. At mm. 3 and 4 the violins open with a half step (B flat–A) followed by a perfect fifth glissando (Ex. 4.2).

Ex. 4.2

![Ex. 4.2](image-url)
This opening figure subsequently leads into a complete statement of the primary row (as P-11) at mm. 8–11 (Ex. 4.3), demonstrating a process of thematic growth similar to that found in other parts of the work (e.g., the first theme in Movement I).

Together with the trilled sequences, the row ranks as the other most important element in this movement. Whereas the trills initiate phrases or sections, the primary row, as stated in mm. 8–11, eventually evolves into a final cadential gesture at the end of the movement, another example of Sessions’ growth principle. In this early part of the movement, however, the row functions in a thematic capacity, the articulation and rhythm smoother and less incisive than in the final measures. This first thematic statement of the row leads almost immediately into the next phrase that also consists of a complete presentation of the row, this time P-2. Stated in five instrumental parts (first flute, piccolo, clarinets, violins, and violas) at m. 8, the row is introduced distinctly and purposefully, thus ensuring its effectiveness when it returns later at mm. 181–84 and at mm. 328–330 in a cadential role.

Between mm. 13 and 30 Sessions develops upon the thematic use of the row, the trill motif, as well as the violin’s opening glissando gesture. At mm. 13–21 the violins present the thematic idea, based on PI-3 (the first hexachord ordered, the second unordered). This leads into a trilled climax
from mm. 18–21, marking the first phrase-ending. Sessions also indicates this with a breath mark at the end of m. 21. A new phrase, consisting of eighth-note sequences, begins at m. 22. A crescendo takes this passage to a forte in the French horns at m. 24, followed by a downward cadential gesture, similar to that found in the first movement. This phrase ends at m. 25 as the entire woodwind section trills on A flat. Meanwhile, overlapping this cadence, the violins introduce a new phrase at m. 25 with the half-step/fifth glissando motif first seen at m. 3. Another dynamic progression ensues, initiated by a repetitive eighth-note sequence in the woodwinds and ‘cellos (mm. 31–32), and joined by some of the brass instruments at m. 33. At m. 34, as the horns, trumpets, and trombones continue the pulsing eighth-note pattern, the woodwinds and the violins play quarter-note beats (wind section has alternating eighth note, eighth rest) leading to the whole-note tutti chord at m. 35 against a pulsing timpani and viola section. The tension subsequently releases as the brass instruments and then the woodwinds play a rocking seventh motif (as ascending and descending minor seventh leaps) that functions as a prolongation of the cadence (mm. 36–42). These seventh leaps are later taken by the piccolo (this time as ascending major sevenths) in the closing measures of this section.

Mm. 42–54 are an extension of the quiet atmosphere first initiated at m. 36. These 13 measures also constitute one of the static passages that Sessions writes about in his program notes; they represent the calm that concludes one busy section and prepares for a resurgence in the next section. This passage brings together several familiar elements: the tremolo which is an extension of the trill, trilled whole notes, reminiscent of the
opening measures of A material, and the piccolo's seventh leaps found in the closing measures of Movement II.

**Section B (mm. 55–114)**

The seventh leaps, highlighted by the piccolo in mm. 47–49, remain the primary focus as the violins initiate the onset of the B section at m. 55. This section consists of two parts: the first is more lyrical, growing out of the ascending seventh figure (Ex. 4.4) while the second is more boisterous, more rhythmic, characterized by triplet quarter notes (Ex. 4.5). The pitches in these few measures are from the inversion of the secondary set (SI-8) with some reordering. This movement, thus, uses both the primary row form (introduced as the second theme in Movement I) and the secondary set (central to Movement III).

Ex. 4.4
The lyrical and the rhythmic components of this section belong together for two main reasons: first, no definitive cadence divides the first subsection from the second; secondly, the information that Sessions provides concerning the overall form of this movement, together with the music itself, support this view.

As mentioned before, the trilled opening with its thematic material and the primary row serve to mark the return of A. The B section between A and A\(^1\) is replicated as an expanded variation in Section B\(^1\) between A\(^1\) and A\(^2\) (which also functions as a coda). The two main ideas of B i.e., the lyrical, rather transparent line and the more thickly-textured, rhythmic passage return in the same order at mm. 215–290 (labeled Section B\(^1\)). In both B sections, the strong cadence comes after the energetic second subsection.

Between the two sub-sections is a quiet, five-measure passage that quickly opens up both texturally and dynamically to the ff that marks the onset of the second sub-section. It is within this quiet passage that we find the seeds of the larger ideas that constitute the bolder second sub-section. At mm. 90–94 the English horn and then the oboe play triplet half-notes that develop into triplet quarter notes at mm. 95–96 and then into the \(\frac{\text{d}}{\text{e}}\) sequences of the second sub-section beginning at m. 98.
At m. 105 the downward cadential gesture begins with decreased dynamics, lower registers, a thinner texture, and longer note values, all of which contribute to the sense of arrival. The violas and ‘cellos, in the meantime, play an extended tremolo at mm. 107–114, suggesting a continuing undercurrent of energy and a feeling of anticipation. This tremolo is also reminiscent of the trill motif of Section A. As the following measures bear out, this tremolo gesture serves as a preparation for the return of A at m. 114.

Section A¹ (mm. 114–215)  
Section B¹ (mm. 215–291)

These two sections are variations of Section A and B respectively. Section A¹, which begins in the second half of m. 114, develops upon the trill and the violin glissando idea of Section A while Section B¹ enlarges upon the main ideas found in Section B. Going by measure numbers alone, both variation sections are significantly longer than their corresponding themes. In both cases, the musical gestures and dynamic levels are larger and bolder.

In Section A¹ one of the more obvious enlargements is in the role of the xylophone. In the first A section, although the xylophone plays a similar articulative role, its appearance is more limited, presenting an unordered 12-tone row at mm. 29–33 and a few sharply articulated chords. In the variation, however, the xylophone has a more pronounced presence. At mm. 125–130 the xylophone helps to accentuate the percussive effect that Sessions seeks to create. The same notes could perhaps have been assigned to plucked strings or to another group of wind
instruments with staccatissimo accents, but neither of these would have
achieved the same kind of bite as the xylophone does at this point in the
movement. The cumulation of energy and excitement of the preceding
measures call for increased dynamic levels and more incisive articulation.
The use of the xylophone thus heightens the sense of tension and forward
motion.

At mm. 174–180 the xylophone plays a succession of eighth notes
followed by a sequence of eighth notes and eighth-note rests from m. 176.
This is an orchestral tutti passage and all the instruments contribute to the
surge toward the next point of arrival. The flute’s shrill register and the
xylophone’s percussive articulation help in enhancing the atmosphere of
anticipation and excitement. Together with the other instruments, they
prepare for the tutti entrance of P-0 at mm. 181–184, an apparent climax in
this part of the movement, judging from the way the tension and energy
builds up to the return of the primary row.

At m. 184 the metrical change from 2/2 to 3/2 results in an articulation
that suggests a phrase-ending (Ex. 4.6).

Ex. 4.6

Considering that texture subsequently thins out, these twelve notes
clearly serve a cadential purpose. The cadence is further reinforced at mm.
190–194 as the violins state the first 10 notes of PI-8 in augmented note
values. Dynamic levels are reduced and the accompanying parts turn
slightly more static as the strings play an oscillating pattern that eventually becomes a series of repeated eighth notes. Above this static accompaniment, the flute and the English horn state row segments in generally long note values. The result is a sense of closure as well as preparation for contrasting material. One could say that the way in which the row is stated in mm. 180–184 prepares the ear for its larger, more insistent cadential gesture at the close of the work. In other words, its appearance at the end, though somewhat surprising (because of its tonal character in a non-tonal context), is the culmination of an idea that has already been prepared and highlighted in an earlier part of the movement.

Section A\textsuperscript{1} draws to a close at m. 195, led by a thinning texture, rallentando, and reduced dynamic levels. At mm. 196–213 another static passage is found, separating Section A\textsuperscript{1} from the next major division. With a slower tempo (Tranquillo \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{}=88-92} \)), this passage consists largely of tremolo thirds and long held notes.

At mm. 214–219 preparation begins for the return of B material, aided by the syncopated rhythm of seventh leaps (see cadential sevenths in Section A, mm. 36–42) and by Sessions’ tempo indication: poco a poco riprendendo il tempo, (literally “taking back the tempo little by little”), leading into m. 220 and a return to Tempo I. Mm. 220–275 see a return of B material, this time presented in fuller orchestral texture. Like the preceding section (a variation of A), this next section builds upon the ideas presented in Section B, presenting them in larger gestures and bolder colors. At mm. 58–61 the first main idea of Section B is initiated by the first flute. Here, at m. 220–222, an entire section of first violins play a similar line (see Ex. 4.7), starting this time on B flat instead of G.
Within the first few measures of this section, rhythmic patterns that originated in earlier movements can also be found. The trumpets and oboes at mm. 220–221 (Ex. 4.8a) play a rhythm first seen in mm. 157–159 of Movement II (Ex. 4.8b).

A similar pattern occurs in the brass section at mm. 233–236.

Another gesture that originates from an earlier movement is the upward sweep of eighth notes that functions as a structural upbeat at mm. 114–116 in Movement II. Here, in this final movement, this gesture is replicated as quarter notes at m. 235 by the bass clarinet and bassoons, joined by the other woodwinds at mm. 236–237.
Section B¹ draws to a close at mm. 269–275 with a downward gesture. But instead of employing the primary row (more prominent in Sections A, A¹, and A²), Sessions uses the secondary set, used earlier as the main resource for Movement III. The violins state S-8 in its entirety at mm. 268–271, tracing a descent towards the D# whole note at m. 271 (Ex. 4.9). The pizzicato strings and muted brass at mm. 271–273, together with the diminuendo and rallentando, underscore the sense of cadence.

Ex. 4.9

Section A² (mm. 290–330)

Mm. 275–290 see a return of elements found in earlier dividing passages: the tremolo, static triplet half-notes, and the seventh leap. At m. 291 a new section begins, initiated by long whole notes that have the effect of tolling bells ushering in the return of A material. It appears that Sessions intended for the returning A section to begin structurally at m. 290 since he marks an open bracket at the first whole note in the piccolo
part. Aurally, these whole notes also lead right into the trills beginning at m. 296.

At mm. 320–322 the violins state all twelve notes of P-4 as though preparing for, or perhaps anticipating, the cadential passage. A diminuendo follows at mm. 323 and 324. But while the texture is markedly thinner at mm. 325–326 a sense of excitement and interest is maintained with a rapid cresendo that leads into the final drive towards the cadence. The row (P-0) is heard one last time at mm. 327–330, rhythmically structured so as to enhance the sense of closure (Ex. 4.1). The quarter notes trace a descending line and the last four notes (A flat–E flat–C–D flat) suggest a perfect cadence in D flat major, an event which Sessions says he had not planned but which he obviously found rather amusing (see note 2).

As Sessions mentions in his program notes, this section is like a coda, closing out a movement that consisted of two separate themes and their accompanying variations. In some sense, this movement could also be described as a sonata form: Section A and B function as the first and second theme groups respectively in the exposition, followed by the development made up of Section A¹ and Section B¹, and the final section constituting the recapitulation, preceded by a retransition (mm. 275–290).

In fact, in conversation with Andrea Olmstead 30 years after the symphony’s premiere, Sessions said: “The nearest thing in my adult years I wrote to the sonata form is the last movement. It’s not quite a sonata form.”

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6 Olmstead, Conversations, 32.
CONCLUSION

If one were to take the last movement as a three-section movement as in a sonata form, instead of the five sections that Sessions had suggested before the premiere of 1957, then each one of the four movements of the symphony consists of three parts (not necessarily synonymous with ternary form). Movement I, which also comes close to a sonata form, has an exposition consisting of two themes (one of which is the primary row), a development section, and a recapitulation; Movement II is in three sections, akin to a minuet and trio structure; Movement III is a theme and two variations with a short coda; and Movement IV, a large sonata form consisting of an exposition with two large theme groups, a development section that is essentially an extended variation of the two theme groups, and a recapitulation that brings back only the first theme group. The movements are therefore not only unified by the primary row (which serves as the main point of reference), certain basic motives and gestures which are subsequently enlarged or varied, compositional principles (such as developing variations, motivic growth/progression), and recurring rhythmic patterns, but they also share a structural similarity: each movement can be divided into three logical sections.

As mentioned earlier in this study, Sessions tended to work with small cells or motives, extending them into longer lines. While demonstrating an astute ability to create contrast from similar ideas, he also proved himself adept at creating tightly-unified works. His Third Symphony bears out the compositional principles that he taught: progression or cumulation, association and development, and contrast. In fact, so well-crafted are his variations that he accomplishes both
progression and association through that one medium of expression. It appears that in the course of writing his variations and in seeking to apply twelve-tone principles via organic development, Sessions must have borne in mind that

Since music is an art of time and not of space, its effect must be cumulative and not static. Successive impressions must either maintain the level of intensity, of interest, of movement established at the outset, or they must raise it. Otherwise, in somewhat primitive terms, the tension relaxes, the ear becomes bored, and the music lags. 7

Never, even in its quietest moments, does this symphony lose momentum nor weaken. Its spiritedness, pulsating rhythms, and its overall cohesiveness set this work apart.

Ten years after his passing Sessions still has much to teach us about music, demonstrating how even the smallest musical idea or something as structured as the twelve-tone set can possess remarkable potential for growth and development. By integrating this compositional approach with twelve-tone principles and by adopting traditional forms and devices, Sessions created a work that not only penetrated the future but also paid homage to the past. Perhaps the approaching centennial 8 of his birth will mark the onset of a much-deserved awakening of interest in Sessions' music.


8 A centennial conference in 1996 is being organized by the Roger Sessions Society, Inc. Further information may be obtained by contacting Barry Salwen at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.
Appendix I

A. Primary Set
B. Inversion of Primary Set
C. Secondary Set
D. Inversion of Secondary Set
A. Primary Set

P-0

P-1

P-2

P-3

P-4

P-5

P-6

P-7

P-8

P-9

P-10

P-11
B. Inversion of Primary Set
C. Secondary Set
D. Inversion of Secondary Set
Appendix II

Newspaper Articles on Sessions' Third

(Courtesy of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Archives)
Premiere of Sessions Symphony

Pierre Fournier, soloist.
In the Schumann Concerto

By Rosalind Shere

It was with a certain excitement that we were to witness the premiere of the Sessions Symphony in terms of another sense..."response," the order of the concert. The order of the concert would run counter to the order of the program...response. Sessions' sense of style is similar to Beethoven's, and a sense of style is primarily determined by the audience. Yet, one might call it the sense of style...response. Sessions' Symphony is in this context much like a Schumann Concerto.

Pierre Fournier, soloist, in the Schumann Concerto...response. Sessions' Symphony is in this context much like a Schumann Concerto.

Pierre Fournier, soloist, in the Schumann Concerto...response. Sessions' Symphony is in this context much like a Schumann Concerto.
BOSTON, Mass.
Independent
Circ. 40,000

DEC 7, 1957

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Sawyers' New Third Symphony

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is currently under the direction of Charles Munch, and on Tuesday night at 8, the third of his operas, "The Glimmerglass," will be presented at the Symphony Hall.

The orchestra, under Mr. Sawyers, plays an important role in the success of the performance. The music is of a high standard and is well received by the audience.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is one of the foremost in the world. It has played a major role in the development of American music and has been responsible for many important musicians.

Mr. Sawyers' new Third Symphony is a significant contribution to the body of American music. It is a well-written work, full of musical ideas and expressive power.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra has a long and distinguished history. It has been a major force in American music for many years and continues to be an important cultural institution.

What is Think?

Music is one of the most powerful tools of our time. It has the power to inspire, uplift, and transform. The Boston Symphony Orchestra has always been a leader in this area, and continues to be a beacon of hope and beauty in our world.

The symphony is a reflection of the spirit of its city. It is a symbol of Boston's rich cultural heritage. It is a source of pride for all who love music and for all who love Boston.

Mr. Sawyers' new Third Symphony is a testament to the power of music. It is a work of great beauty and expression. It is a work that will inspire and uplift all who hear it. It is a work that will continue to be a part of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's legacy for many years to come.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra is a symbol of Boston's beauty and grace. It is a symbol of the spirit of our city. It is a symbol of the power of music. It is a symbol of the beauty of life. It is a symbol of hope. It is a symbol of Boston.
MUSIC

Symphony Concert

The earth is enrobed in clouds, but the sun is shining through;
It is a fine day, and the music is delightful.

The orchestra is led by the conductor, who is a master of his art.

The audience is seated in comfort, enjoying the music.

The performance is a beautiful example of musical artistry.

This is an extraordinary event that should not be missed.
SESSIONS' THIRD
His New Work Utilizes 40-Year-Old Theme

By EDWARD DOWNESE

"W"e hear much too much talk about technique nowadays," declared Roger Sessions basically, "as if techniques were the crux of music being written in our time."

Mr. Sessions, whose Third Symphony will be given its first New York performance in Carnegie Hall next Wednesday by the Boston Symphony, was en route from his home in Princeton, N. J., to appointments with his New York publishers and luncheon downtown with his old friend, Aaron Copland.

"Real harm has been done."

Mr. Sessions continued, "some of it by composers themselves, who have debated contemporary systems and techniques as if they were the point, the actual content of the music. No one, of course, would deny the importance of technique to the composer, but it is primarily a composer's private affair. It is his vehicle of expression. The point is what his music expresses."

There are musicians to whom the word "expression," perhaps because of some nineteenth-century connotations, means something false or fuzzy. For thirty years or more there has been a tiresome stream of abstractions, often to the effect that music should not express anything, that it is an abstract design in tone and time, an impersonal structure.

Realism

Mr. Sessions' less fashionable, but more realistic point of view is that music cannot help expressing, if a person cannot prevent his handwriting or any other activity from expressing his feelings, how can he prevent his music from doing so?"

But when he looks back on a finished piece of music and is asked to diagnose it Mr. Sessions grows as cautious as a philosopher. When he is writing it he is consumed by unfocussed, instinctive-seeming activity. Analyzing in retrospect is quite a different matter. Mr. Sessions does not believe that love or loathing or impatience or despair are what is expressed in his "Idyll of Thracia," or in any other composer's music—even Wagner's "Tristan." Music, he feels, expresses something more fundamental, perhaps more specific, emotional, climate, basic patterns of possible ebb and flow, the tempo and dynamics of feeling, these are the powerful things music reflects and, Mr. Sessions believes, they account for its strong appeal to us.

We complained to Mr. Sessions that most composers we had heard asked to comment on, one of their own works sounded maddeningly inarticulate, or at least reluctant to communicate in words.

Mr. Sessions' eye twinkled behind his horn-rimmed glasses. He chuckled and gestured as if to acknowledge that he, too, had sometimes given uninformative explanations.

"This time we hoped we had him trapped. Would he explain what he was driving at in his music? He had already committed himself so far as to say he considers his Third Symphony to belong very necessarily to a series of works that began with his Second String Quartet of 1931. What other works make up this group and what have they in common?"

"The Idyll of Thracia," would belong there, Mr. Sessions said, with his Mass and Piano Concerto. As to their common artistic qualities, he feels they are more lyric than his earlier works and somehow more personal. The Third Symphony is especially lyric in spirit, although it has a tight scheme and a vigorous finale.

Mr. Sessions said the symphony's second, lyric theme coming from a phrase he had had in mind for forty years.

Growth

During the early, baffling and often disheartening days of work on the symphony, the theme grew and expanded. Then one day he realized that his expanding theme had embraced all twelve chromatic notes of the scale and had become a potential tone-row.

Somehow this clarified his own work to him. Going back analytically over what he had already composed he found that in several places, notably the opening pages, he had used adaptations of serial techniques. What he had done first by impulse, he now embraced conscientiously and the last movement of the symphony was composed with perfect awareness of the row and associated devices. Paradoxically, the lyrical theme of the first movement, which had been the genesis of the tone-row, also served as the final, traditional sounding cadence that concluded the entire work.

Was it planned that way? Not at first. But when things go well in the composer's workshop, there seems to be a happy fusion of an all-absorbing expressive drive, a technique that functions below the level of consciousness, and a critical sense, as well as a taste."

Above all, Mr. Sessions added, the impulse comes first, in time and importance.
The second visit of the season of the Boston Symphony Orchestra offered a major novelty, Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The conductor, Koussevitzky, in the latter part of the season, has been most successful in the conductor's art.

The performance was very good, and the Symphony No. 7 was played with precision and feeling. The first movement, with its famous theme, was played with great precision. The second movement was played with great feeling, and the third movement was played with great precision and feeling. The fourth movement was played with great precision and feeling.

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SESSIONS THIRD
Strange to Ear

By MILLS KASTENBERG

Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony offered one of their less attractive but one of their more important programs last night at Carnegie Hall.

It contained Roger Sessions' third symphony, composed for the 150th anniversary of the orchestra and given in first risk performance. It is a hard piece to take, both orchestra and audience found it problematical, so as to enjoy.

This kind of intense music still falls short on the ear. Even when it is enthusiastically composed with obvious elements and with definite atmosphere it provides little solid ground for the average music lover. There was much to admire in the execution and the acoustical sensitivity is doubted, especially the Adagio declined in the slow movement.

Quite Difficult
As theoretical or abstract music, however, the symphony represents the composer's out-of-touch and possibly out-of-reach with all but the initiated or rationalizing few. Though it might well be placed in a sub-class of the future category, it still counts as experimental and relates itself to what is unachievable than that of Brahms in this time. The fact that conductor and orchestra gave it a perfectly well-timed and executed performance established what followed.

A number of noises indicated the tension of the audience. The rapid applause took a couple of minutes to get started. The performers deserved a good round of applause for their precision that it has terminal effects for the music.
Music: Sessions' Third Symphony

Work Is Introduced by the Bostonians

By HOWARD TAURMAN

ROGER SESSIONS has rarely, if ever, set out to charm and win easy success. His new Third Symphony, meticulously varied like all of his relatively limited output, neither charms nor takes an audience by storm. But it bears the mark of a composer with a mind and style of his own. If it does not stir profoundly at first acquaintance, it deserves respect as well as further hearings.

The symphony had its first New York performance at Carnegie Hall last night. Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony, which together with the Roosevelt Music Foundation commissioned it for the orchestra’s seventy-fifth anniversary, brought it to town. It is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky.

Mr. Sessions works slowly, and this symphony, like his other major works, was several years in the making. The composer has a reputation for being grim and unyielding in his music. It is true that his works take a lot of absorbing, and even then they are not likely to be to the majority’s taste. But in this symphony he has bent. That is, for Sessions. But that is a long way from being readily accessible.

The work is in the conventional four movements. As Mr. Sessions himself has indicated, the first movement “may be compared approximately to the three sections of a classic ‘sonata’ form” and the second corresponds to “the classic ‘minuet’ or scherzo.” The third is broad and elegiac, and the fourth is full of brisk rhythms and sharply contrasting colors.

But enclosed within this familiar framework is original material independently worked out. No fixed formula such as one based on twelve-tone principles is followed, but there are intimations that some of the practices of this school have been absorbed naturally into the tissue of the writing. The total impression is of knottiness. The symphony is not quite as gnarled as some of Mr. Sessions’ other works. The melodic writing, rhythmic interplay, handling of sonorities and development of ideas remain personal and singular in profile but are not forbidding. Indeed, there is a kind of shy, hesitant lyricism in places of the first two movements, and the third is almost openly expressive.

Mr. Munch conducted a decisive, controlled performance of the work, and the orchestra played it as securely as if there were no difficulties. The reception of the audience seemed to range from polite to friendly. Mr. Sessions, who was there and took several bows, had a right to be satisfied. The symphony, as is usual with him, does not compromise and does not beg for quick affection.

The soloist was Pierre Fournier, the French cellist, in Schumann’s ‘Cello Concerto. Not one of the romantic maestro’s great works, the concerto is played rarely. While Mr. Fournier could not imbue it with the fire and ardor it lacks, he brought refinement of taste to it. His phrasing had warmth and distinction, and he rightly did not try to turn the concerto into a virtuoso showcase. He had a little trouble with his tone and intonation, but the essential style was there.

Mr. Munch led his orchestra in sensitively balanced support. The ensemble tone was restrained without loss of its natural glow. For more full-bodied utterance there was the Brahms “Academic Festival” Overture at the beginning and the Prelude and Liebestod from Wagner’s “Tristan und Isolde” at the end.
MUSIC TO MY EARS

Memphis Goes Back to Bloch—Debut of Leeburg

IT is not often that a worthy score by a celebrated contemporary has an opportunity to make its appearance on this side of the Atlantic. In the case of Bloch's "Shelob's Evasion," however, this has been accomplished. The score was performed by two leading pianists of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and the result was a resounding success. The performance was characterized by a fine balance of tone and a great deal of technical skill. The orchestra played with great precision, and the soloists were equally impressive. The audience was completely captivated by the performance, and the reception was enthusiastic. It was a triumph for both the composer and the performers, and a significant event in the musical life of the city.
MODERN MUSIC IS BEST SERVED BY THE ORCHESTRA

By Joseph Kernan

The New York Philharmonic plays four times a week for 26 weeks—means one of the concert goers has to visit one of the New York orchestras, even for a dozen concerts locally. Many other prominent hands visit once or twice. There is a flourishing Little Orchestra Society, and a great deal else.

The second is a significant one: All the concerts are headed with 26 weeks—means one because of the customary pre-season discount with the Musician, which leaves nothing else a 26-week season. The Boston and the Philadelphia, our two greatest orchestras, each give a dozen concerts locally. Many other prominent hands visit once or twice. There is a flourishing Little Orchestra Company as an institution.

The violinist, for all its complexity, three parts: simple and subtly, and its movement, its simplicity. The Cleveland Orchestra, the National Symphony from Washington, often a polite 20th-century program: or orchestral music is the word. Shostakovich and two American novelties, including a symphony by John Vincent of UCLA. New works of the greatest importance have been presented at the first two Boston concerts: Stravinsky's "Canticum Sacrum," and Roger Sessions' 2nd Symphony. Even the Philadelphia Orchestra ventured contemporary music of the Friday afternoon variety.

The third fact is most surprising of all. Modern music is better served by the orchestras than by the other. For one thing, the program scheduled by the local organization: Under Dimitri Mitropoulos, this year, Schoenberg's Piano Concerto, Strauss' "Elektra" and "Sinfonia Espansiva," the Mahler 10th, the Copland and under Leonard Bernstein, the "Rite of Spring" and such music by the young Harvard director, composed new works of all kinds, mostly on the safe side. There is good reason for the anxiety felt all over the country about the state of our orchestras, and certainly the New York Philharmonic has its share of troubles. But judging from the surface William Steinberg and the Symphony Orchestra in the music that the effect warrants. But where the musical ideas are largely controlled, as in the early movements, the treble sounds, both exciting and enthralling.

"Naturally, the Philharmonic is back to Seattle." Second Symphony, which received its premiere in San Francisco ten years ago. Both works are notable. "No music, for its novelty and for its revival of older pieces of medium scope. Thomas Scherman in his second, angelic, driving spirit and conductor, was in this last capacity he is less than adequate. The players like him, the public likes him, and the critics like him.

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ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Score and Recording


Commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in celebration of its 75th anniversary in 1957 and dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky. Published by Edward B. Marks, the study score is now available from Hal Leonard Publishing. Orchestral parts are available on rental from Theodore Presser. The complete score is included here by permission from Hal Leonard.


A commendable production and, so far, the only commercial recording available. First released as a long-playing record, it was subsequently reissued as a compact disc with support from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation.

Lecture


This lecture draws attention to the elements upon which our musical culture is built and the role that tradition plays in the creation of music that endures and communicates.

Books and Articles

Provides an excellent overview of Sessions' life and work. As with most Grove entries, includes a list of his works (both text and music) as well as a short bibliography of books and articles on him.


Examines twentieth-century music in theoretical and historical context. Includes substantial information on American composers. Particularly relevant to this study is the chapter entitled "Varied approaches to the twelve-tone principle and rhythmic formulation in the United States," in which Antokoletz compares the two postwar approaches to serial composition: Sessions' organic development and the block construction of Stravinsky and Copland.


A thoroughly researched work, this dissertation provides considerable insight into Sessions' attitude towards the twelve-tone method. Campbell examines Sessions' pre-twelve-tone works and his mature twelve-tone practice, using the Third Piano Sonata as an example. An analysis of the first movement of this sonata is included in the Appendix. The bibliography is substantial.


Covers nearly 50 years of Sessions' writings, many of which were presented as lectures. This collection reflects changes in his attitudes towards certain specific issues, both musical and general in nature. Sessions comments that some of these changes result from "developing familiarity and understanding on the purely artistic level."


Based on an interview with the composer, prior to the Carnegie Hall premiere on December 11, 1957. Provides added insight into the symphony and Sessions' philosophy. Complete article included in Appendix II to this paper.

Probably more insightful and incisive than the article by Abruzzo and Weinberg in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Includes a paragraph on the Third Symphony, summarizing Sessions' orchestral approach. The writers conclude with remarks about Sessions' reputation, the slow pace of public recognition, and his unswerving sense of purpose and integrity. The bibliography and works list that follow are sizeable, more comprehensive than those found with the Abruzzo and Weinberg article. Included also is a list of performances and recordings.


Discusses Sessions' first eight symphonies (his ninth symphony was written in 1978) and the changes in style and compositional approach. Well-written, informative, and certainly worth reading.


Perhaps the single most significant and the most comprehensive account of Sessions' life and work, this volume provides a summary of individual compositions, highlighting salient characteristics of each work, and its historical context.


An edited compilation of taped interviews with the composer. Published two years after his death, the conversations recorded here provide insight into his personality, his style of speech, the experiences that influenced his musical output, his attitude towards pieces and his opinion of their performances. Includes a comprehensive bibliography and list of works and recordings.

An annotated collection of selected letters written and received by the composer between 1909 and 1982. Provides considerable insight into the personality of the composer and his relationships. An invaluable contribution to the study of Sessions and his music.


The writer champions Sessions' cause from the outset, describing the composer's philosophy and his attitude towards the musical environment of his time. Schubart demonstrates a keen understanding and appreciation of Sessions, both as a person as well as a composer.


A generally reluctant theorist, Sessions uses this opportunity to air some of his central views about music and how it should be approached, its aesthetic value, and the importance of a "willing ear." He points out that music must be listened to "without preconceived ideas or forced attitudes," and that though a work may be the expression of many feelings, impressions, and experiences, it ultimately achieves an autonomous existence, arousing in the listener "feelings which are molded by the latter's own experience."


This book may be described as a guide to aesthetics from the composer's, rather than the philosopher's, viewpoint. The difference, Sessions says, is that the practicing artist's views are based on experience, not scholarly research, systematic thought, or speculation. A compilation of Norton lectures, delivered at Harvard University in 1968–69, it examines questions about listening and understanding music, performance, composition, and the relationship between music and culture.
The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener.

Similar in content to Questions About Music. Sessions discusses his compositional principles, and the roles of performers and listeners.


This review of the Carnegie Hall premiere perhaps a good example of what Harbison and Olmstead describe as a “guarded, respectful, seldom genuinely enthusiastic” response to Sessions’ music. The complete article is included with this paper.


A well-written, readable description and review of The Correspondence of Roger Sessions. Included also is information on recently released recordings of Sessions’ music. The writer, who studied with Sessions for several years, illuminates this review with some of his personal reflections.