

Ligeti the Maverick?

An Examination of Ligeti's Ambivalent Role in Contemporary Music

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Introduction

György Ligeti is one of the most significant Hungarian composers of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the way he has created an accessible but instantly recognizable musical language, with a particular focus on texture and timbre. He has often been described as a maverick or an outsider by many commentators,¹ and this assumption has rarely been challenged by writers on his music. In this article, I will examine to what extent Ligeti can be genuinely considered a maverick, or whether this epithet is perhaps a simplification of a more complex situation. The OED's definition of a maverick is 'an unorthodox or independent-minded person: a person who refuses to conform to the views of a particular group or party: an individualist.'² This definition is close to the often repeated view of Ligeti when compared with his peers and colleagues, and it is also the view that Ligeti himself projects in his many interviews.

Many other composers have been considered to be mavericks and this is particularly the case for those in North America. As Michael Broyles suggests: 'Americans have reveled in the idea of the maverick, and along the way there have been many. Composers who lived unusual lives or flaunted norms, writing works their contemporaries found incomprehensible, even unplayable, have a long history in American music.'³ Here he is talking about composers such as Charles Ives, John Cage and Harry Partch whose music is clearly outside of the mainstream. They seem to be

¹ The Soundscape conference in Maccagno, Italy, in July 2014, used 'Ligeti the Maverick' as its title.

² OED Online, <http://www.oed.com> (Oxford University Press, June 2017), entry 115217.

³ Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

more concerned with the purity and uniqueness of their ideas than worldly success—although in Cage’s case it is this very uniqueness and originality that enabled his ideas to become so influential. Broyles goes on to state that ‘the very meaning of the word *maverick* suggests some dissonance between the musician so labeled and society. That dissonance allows an observer to get beyond platitudes and superficial notions to understand what attitudes about music really were.’⁴ Alan Rich suggests that maverick composers have become a significant part of the mainstream, when he suggests that ‘far from defining a small rebellious faction of nut-case music-makers out on the far edge, “American maverick” now defines the vigorous growing tip of all music, fiercely independent and assured.’⁵

Therefore the term maverick suggests a fracture between the individual artist and the society and culture in which they operate. This fracture seems to be found more commonly in the modernist period when artists were creating new languages through the rejection of the past. In Europe this can be seen in the early twentieth century with composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern—particularly in the manner that Schoenberg reacted against criticism from his Viennese audience by withdrawing his music from public performance through setting up the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen in 1919.

Later composers reacted against Schoenberg’s technique of serialism as it became the mainstream in the mid-twentieth century, particularly in the United States. As Broyles observes: ‘... Varèse, Cage, Partch and others, not only sought new ways of doing things but expanded the idea of music itself to encompass dimensions that undermined seriously and fatally the closed universe the serialists had constructed.’⁶ This is similar to Ligeti’s responses in the late 1950s and 1960s when he rejected the total serialism of contemporaries such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen because of the way that this technique flattened out the musical material, like combining several colours of plasticine together which eventually ‘give place to a uniform grey.’⁷ But Ligeti was not the only composer of the 1960s who challenged the serial orthodoxy; others include Iannis Xenakis, Mauricio Kagel and John Tavener, although there is little which binds these composers’ musical approaches together.

⁴ Broyles, 2–3.

⁵ Alan Rich, ‘The American Maverick Tradition’, in Susan Key and Larry Roth (eds), *American Maverick: Musical Visionaries, Pioneers, Iconoclasts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2–15: 6.

⁶ Broyles, 299.

⁷ György Ligeti, ‘Wandlungen der musikalischen Form’, *Die Reihe*, 7 (1960), 5–19: 10, trans. Cornelius Cardew as ‘Metamorphoses of Musical Form’, *Die Reihe*, 7 (1965), 5–28: 10.

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Broyles's statement on American mavericks also rings true for those from other parts of the world when he states that 'whether driven by anger, bemusement, or experimental curiosity; the maverick laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new musical culture, the implications of which are still unclear to much of the musical world.'⁸

Richard Toop, in his general introduction to Ligeti (1999), states that 'since [the mid-1970s] Ligeti has established a unique reputation as a composer whose work reaches way beyond the confines of the avant garde: as a modernist who has gone beyond the old versions of modernism and found new, broader and more appealing possibilities ... and nowadays Ligeti is frequently hailed as the saviour of modern music.'⁹ These seem to be rather exaggerated claims as clearly Ligeti is not the only modernist composer who changed his style and language in the late twentieth century; other notable examples include Krzysztof Penderecki, Peter Maxwell Davies and Luciano Berio. Richard Steinitz suggests that Ligeti was attracted to other maverick composers, with the strong implication that he was also one: 'ever attracted to outsiders and mavericks—the more detached from any establishment the better—Ligeti was intrigued by Partch, as he would later be by Nancarrow and Vivier.'¹⁰ This observation is undoubtedly true and the player-piano music of Conlon Nancarrow was particularly significant for the development of Ligeti's multi-layered rhythmic streams in his music from the 1980s onwards. Charles Wilson has observed the way that the label of maverick has been used to sell Ligeti's music to the public: 'since the late 1980s the marketing of Ligeti's music has played relentlessly on the image of the composer as "maverick", exploiting his striking appearance ... described [by one journalist] as "the professorial shock of white hair, the sunken eyes".'¹¹ Robin Holloway, in his review of Steinitz's book on Ligeti, suggests that the latter has a 'maverick, subversive, quicksilver nature' in contrast to the solid qualities of the book, but clarifies his thoughts when he suggests that the 'extreme purity of his [Ligeti's] stance ... put[s] him in a solitary position. He uniquely has been able to combine such severity with a simultaneous ability to get through, out of, beyond it, transcending the intoned ivory ghetto, to enter with absolutely no compromise or traduction a wider

⁸ Broyles, 299.

⁹ Richard Toop, *György Ligeti* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 6–7.

¹⁰ Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 192–3.

¹¹ Charles Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 1/1 (2004), 5–28: 21.

sphere of communicable content.¹² Thus Holloway sees Ligeti as unique because of the way he has kept his artistic integrity while also appealing to an audience beyond the contemporary ghetto; although perhaps a genuine maverick would not be so concerned about communicating with a wider audience. Holloway does not consider Ligeti's oeuvre to be as significant as those of composers such as Elliott Carter and Olivier Messiaen, but he does liken what he calls Ligeti's relative parsimony of his material to that of Stravinsky's later music, and implies that Ligeti is not part of the 'general degeneration of the avant-garde that had dominated the ideology of the immediate post-war years.'¹³

Ligeti's music of the 1960s

I would firstly like to examine Ligeti's music of the 1960s to ascertain how far this shows 'maverick' qualities, and will then go on to consider his later music. Before he escaped to the West, Ligeti was an established composer in the Budapest contemporary music scene with a considerable depth and range of compositional output (these works have emerged and been published later). What characterizes mature works such as the *Concert Românesc* (1951) and his first String Quartet (1953–4) is the clear debt to the music of Bartók and Kodály in terms of the melodic and harmonic language used. The *Concert Românesc* is particularly approachable with strong lyrical folk-like melodies and tonal harmony, although the finale is more adventurous: Steinitz describes it as 'a sort of Keystone Kops meets Beijing Opera on the plains of Transylvania'.¹⁴ These works from Ligeti's later Hungarian period are very different in style and language from those which made such an initial impact in the West: the dense orchestral works *Apparitions* (1958–9) and *Atmosphères* (1961). This stylistic transformation from the first string quartet to *Apparitions* is quite radical given the short period of time it took place within; it is as if Ligeti almost instantly reinvented himself as a Western modernist composer after 1956. The focus of these large-scale orchestral works is almost entirely on textural evolution and timbre—undoubtedly strongly influenced by Ligeti's experiences in the studio of WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) in Cologne, working with Stockhausen and Gottfried Michael Koenig, which opened his mind to a completely new way of thinking about sound.¹⁵ In an

¹² Robin Holloway, 'Ligeti's Half-Century', *The Musical Times*, 145, no. 1889 (Winter, 2004), 54–64: 57 and 64.

¹³ Holloway, 55.

¹⁴ Steinitz, 50.

¹⁵ Constantin Floros, *György Ligeti: Beyond Avant-garde and Postmodernism*, trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 79.

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interview in 1978, however, he states that it was around 1952/3 that 'I had the first notions of static music, and in fact I was thinking of ceasing to work with melody and harmony.'¹⁶ These early textural and static ideas were manifested as orchestral sketches in *Viziók* (1954), which is lost, and *Sötét és világos* (*Darkness and Light*, 1956).

Ligeti's concern with texture and timbre within a multi-layered approach can also be heard in the music of other European composers from this period, for example Xenakis, Stockhausen and Penderecki. Steinitz states that 'although Penderecki and Ligeti soon became associated in the public mind, their technical approach was significantly different. Penderecki emphasised broad washes, generalized clusters, glissandi and noise effects, Ligeti a far more intricate micropolyphonic web in which every part is individually shaped.'¹⁷ Steinitz is making too much of a differentiation between the two composers' approaches, as in the late 1950s and early 1960s the compositional preoccupations of their works have much in common. Both composers were then primarily concerned with texture and timbre as the main musical parameter; both divided the orchestral strings into their individual instrumental parts to create a dense texture; both explored types of cluster chords as the major harmonic element; and both used the archaic structural device of the canon. These elements were used differently in terms of their precise execution, but the intent was similar: to create a musical language where textural evolution and timbre are of prime importance.

Ligeti's use of micropolyphony¹⁸ in both the orchestral works *Apparitions* and *Atmosphères* is not subtle in the manner of his later music of the 1960s such as *Lux aeterna* (1966), but rather is used to create a broad dramatic and textural effect. In *Apparitions* the micropolyphony occurs at letter D (see Example 2) in the second movement and generates an intense and chaotic textural result, based on descending or ascending and mostly chromatic scales, transformed through octave displacements: this is a common technique used in Ligeti's later works which enlivens what would otherwise be quite a predictable chromatic line (see Example 1). If one compares this approach with Penderecki's *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima for 52 Strings* (1960), one can see similar concerns with textures and cluster chords, although not just purely chromatic ones as Penderecki uses quartertones, and there is also a section which uses a canon between three smaller subgroups of strings in the second section of the work

¹⁶ György Ligeti, *György Ligeti in Conversation, with Péter Várnai, Josef Häusler, Claude Samuel and Himself* (London: Eulenberg, 1983), 90.

¹⁷ Steinitz, 99.

¹⁸ Micropolyphony is a technique in which many non-rhythmic canons are superimposed to create a dense polyphonic texture—usually of a chromatic nature.

from bar 26. The use of canon here, however, is quite different to Ligeti's and operates by superimposing transformed versions of the original textural material heard at bar 26 to generate an increasingly complex, dense and rich overall result (see Example 3). The resulting sound mass may not be close to Ligeti's, but there are similar fundamental processes at work, using canon to create an evolving, complex and unfolding texture. There are parallels between Ligeti's and Penderecki's concerns, and this would suggest that Ligeti should not be considered as outsider in this period, because he is dealing with similar issues to those confronted by other composers of the time.

Example 1: Ligeti, *Apparitions*, violins 1 and 2, bars 25–27.

The image shows a musical score for two violins, Violin 1 and Violin 2, covering bars 25 to 27 of Ligeti's *Apparitions*. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Above the staves, there are two brackets, each labeled '4:3', indicating the time signature for the first and second measures of the excerpt. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and a quintuplet (marked '5') in the first measure of each staff. The notation includes various accidentals and dynamic markings, creating a dense and intricate texture.

Wilson, moreover, explores the idea of Ligeti as part of the broad-based modernist movement:

[Ligeti's] commentators ... continue to present him ... as a "dissident", an outsider to the avant garde. In support of this they cite a number of points: his early "heroic" rejection of serialism; his development of a distinctive style of orchestral writing involving dense chromatic clusters; and finally his calculated reintegration of harmony (including formerly "forbidden" consonance such as octaves) and melody. Yet in each of these instances Ligeti was not acting outside of the modernist mainstream at all but very much in the spirit of its evolution, responding to what were evidently perceived as communal problems by a variety of composers.¹⁹

¹⁹ Wilson, 9–10.

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Example 2: *Apparitions*, letter D, bars 24–29.

Reproduced by kind permission from György Ligeti, *Apparitions für Orchester*, ©1964, Universal Edition AG, Vienna, UE18326, www.universaledition.com

1) WILD (♩ = 90, ODER SCHNELLER)
EX ABRUPTE ANFANGEN, MIT AUSSERSTER KRAFT
JEDER STREICHER SPIELT SO INTENSIV, ALS WÄRE
ER SOLO. VIEL BEWEGT, SCHWUNG WICHTIGER, ALS
VOLLKOMMEN SAUBERE INTONATION.

(DEI-GRUPPA BRATTORIN
DUE-CORRI: WIS NISCH
LET-LEER: SAJIAN-YK NE IDEN;
WU-NIERT: DUE-LEER: KATIK
WIKER SPIREN ALL DIE DORRUNG.)

FOCO ME
NO MOSSO
PIU MOSSO

Hr. 4.2
34
56
Pos. 1.2
Tb.
Gg. 1.4
Gg. 11.12
Br. 1.
Vc. 1.
Kb. 1.

ALLE OHNE DPF
ARCO

OHNE DPF
POS. NAT.

POS. NAT.

OHNE DPF
POS. NAT.

OHNE DPF
ARCO

2 1 3 1 3 2
4 8 4 4 4 4

4:3 4:3 4:3 3:2

fff

2:3 2:3 2:3

fff

2:3 2:3 2:3

fff

2:3 2:3 2:3

fff

Example 3: Penderecki, *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, bars 44–49 (the three string groups in canon). Reproduced by kind permission of Alfred Music © 1961 EMI Deshon Music, Inc. SB00902: <https://www.alfred-music.co.uk/shop/threnody.html>

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The image displays a complex musical score for three string groups, labeled I, II, and III, in canon. The score is organized into three main sections, each with its own set of staves. Group I includes 4Vn (Violins), 3VI (Violas), and 2Cb (Cellos). Group II includes 4Vn, 3VI, and 2Cb. Group III includes 4Vn, 3VI, and 2Cb. The notation is dense, featuring various dynamics (pp, p, mf, f, sf, ff, s.p., ppp), articulations (pizz., arco, c.l. batt., i. batt.), and performance instructions (con sord., senza sord.). The score is marked with bar numbers 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 15''.

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Wilson's point is that Ligeti was dealing with issues which were very much alive for modernist composers in this period; that there was a questioning of the primacy of serialism,²⁰ that dense chromatic clusters were legitimate harmony and that in the late 1970s melody and harmony could be reclaimed by composers to enrich the language of contemporaneous music. So Ligeti can be considered to be part of the broader 'modernist mainstream' of the 1960s and 1970s²¹ rather than as an outsider in his musical preoccupations of this period.

Ligeti's criticism of nostalgia

In the 1970s and 1980s Ligeti was keen to articulate his independence of either the mainstream on the one hand or the experimental on the other, for example in an interview with Péter Várnai in 1978 he stated that 'as far as I am concerned I did not follow Stockhausen or Cage when they were guiding stars but went my own way'.²² Ligeti at the time didn't want to be directly associated with Stockhausen who had sheltered him after he escaped to the West in 1956—but of course if he had acknowledged his significant debt to him, then this may have diminished Ligeti's own developing sense of identity. He was very much aware of Stockhausen's revolutionary composition *Gruppen* as the latter had explained its structure to him during its composition.²³ Ligeti then commented on the situation in the late 1970s, that 'now we find nostalgia in the same dominant position and again I do not follow this trend either but remain independent.'²⁴ He said this after the composition of his opera *Le grand macabre* (1974–77) in which ironically he uses many allusions to music of the past and even examples of direct audible quotation, albeit within an over-arching atonal idiom. Examples of quotations in the opera include *La Poule* by Rameau, Schubert's *Grazer Galopp*, a distorted version of *The Entertainer* by Scott Joplin, Offenbach's 'Can-Can' from *Orpheus in the Underworld* and many more.²⁵ Therefore in the opera Ligeti shows aspects of nostalgia himself through his use of past structural models and direct musical quotations.

²⁰ György Ligeti, 'Pierre Boulez: Entscheidung und Automatik in der *Structure Ia*', *Die Reihe*, 4 (1958), 33–63, trans. Laurence Black as 'Pierre Boulez: Decision and Automatism in *Structure Ia*', *Die Reihe*, 4 (1960), 32–62.

²¹ As described by Wilson; it is a moot point if there really was a mainstream in the modernist movement, given the music's variety and range.

²² Ligeti (1983), 30.

²³ Jonathan Cott, *Stockhausen: Conversations with the Composer* (New York: Robson Books, 1973), 71–72, cited in Steinitz, 91.

²⁴ Ligeti (1983), 30.

²⁵ See Michael D. Searby, *Ligeti's Stylistic Crisis: Transformation in His Musical Style 1974–1985* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), chapter 3, 68–87.

Operas that seem to have influenced Ligeti at that time are *Satyricon* (1973) by Bruno Maderna and *Die Soldaten* (1963–64) by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, both of which made use of quotations from past works and had an eclectic approach to style. This change of style in Ligeti's case is largely caused by the need to find a new mode of expression in the opera. His musical style up to this time would not have sufficed because the text would have been inaudible if he had used micropolyphony. Ligeti's music after the composition of the opera became much more eclectic and diverse in its style.

Ligeti's music of the early 1980s seems to show more overtly some of the nostalgia that he complains of in both his contemporaries' and his own students' music. His neo-romantic Horn Trio (1982) is clearly indebted to the models of Brahms and late Beethoven, and caused considerable controversy amongst progressive composers at the time. Ligeti achieves this through his use of historic structures such as ternary form and the passacaglia, combined with a rich harmonic language which is mostly consonant if not quite tonal. According to Steinitz, 'at the Styrian Autumn Festival in Graz in 1984 ... [Ligeti's] stance was aggressively criticised In Hamburg, Helmut Lachenmann openly attacked him.'²⁶ Lachenmann's response is hardly surprising given his more purist and experimental approach to composition. The postmodernist tendency of this period was not pioneered by Ligeti, although some of his students were part of the New Simplicity group, such as Hans-Christian von Dadelsen and Detlev Müller-Siemens. As Ligeti's student Manfred Stahnke recalls: 'in 1974, an interesting situation had developed in Ligeti's [composition] class: Wolfgang von Schweinitz and Detlev Müller-Siemens were experimenting with tonality (the points of reference were Mahler, Schumann or Schubert), and were using traditional forms.'²⁷ Ligeti in his interviews of the period (1978) criticizes this stylistic shift to tonality and the past in his own students' work, stating:

I quite approve of the complete rejection of the past twenty years on the part of the young composers. It is a healthy sign. However, I remain sceptical. It is all right rejecting what is past, but they should do something genuinely new instead of returning to late Romantic pathos-filled German music.²⁸

Ironically this is precisely what Lachenmann and his followers criticized Ligeti for doing in his Horn Trio written only four years later. Ligeti also wrote two harpsichord works in 1978 which seemed to be a creative response to his postmodernist students:

²⁶ Steinitz, 251.

²⁷ Manfred Stahnke, 'The Hamburg Composition Class', in Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx (eds), *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds* (London: Boydell Press, 2011), 223–244: 224.

²⁸ Ligeti (1983), 74.

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Hungarian Rock and *Passacaglia ungherese*. The former is a strange tonal work with a Balkan rhythmic pattern 2+2+3+2 which creates a one-bar ostinato over which a jazz-like solo is placed:

Example 4: Ligeti, *Hungarian Rock*, bars 1–4. © Schott Music. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

Vivacissimo molto ritmico (One Whole bar = MM. 50)

Harpsichord

Hpsd.

GM FM CM DM A C BbM F GM F#m

Gm DbM Cm BbM FM A7 G7 F#dim E7 D#dim

The latter is an almost tonal passacaglia which becomes increasingly erratic and dissonant as the work progresses. Ligeti observed that these 'were not real compositions, but musical arguments in a discussion I was having with my students, who had gone off in a postmodernist direction ... they were ironic comments ...'.²⁹ However, these works are more substantial and significant than he suggests as they relate to the later, more flexible approach to compositional technique from the 1980s onwards.

Therefore, is the changing nature of Ligeti's music in the 1970s and 1980s characteristic of a maverick composer? Or is it actually part of the broader historical shift in contemporary music towards greater approachability and comprehensibility which can be observed across a large range of musical styles and approaches?³⁰ It is difficult to identify one clear mainstream from the 1970s, but there was, rather, a rich plurality of contrasting styles and approaches to composition—a plurality also found in Ligeti's composition classes with his students. His music in the late 70s was in flux, leading to

²⁹ György Ligeti, quoted in Marina Lobanova, *György Ligeti: Style, Ideas, Poetics*, trans. Mark Shuttleworth (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2002), 396.

³⁰ Clearly during this period there are many composers who did not follow this shift towards approachability such as Birtwistle and Xenakis.

a short period before the Horn Trio when composition became very difficult for him. As Steinitz states, '[his] dilemma [of how to compose at this time] sprang from a widespread uncertainty affecting composers in the late 1970s, following the decline in the authority of Darmstadt and the serialist dogma. His own confusion was compounded by periods of ill health.'³¹ Ligeti was critical of postmodern tendencies but, as Charles Wilson suggests, his 'apparent hostility to postmodernism may ... have much to do with his desire to differentiate his own direction at the start of the 1980s from that being taken by the younger generation. Still it is doubtful that a work like the Horn Trio ... could have been composed without the challenges posed by these new "postmodern" tendencies.'³² With Ligeti's Horn Trio it is the overt use of traditional structures such as ternary form and passacaglia, and melodies shaped into clear phrases that suggest its postmodern tendencies. The use of romantically shaped musical phrases is especially noticeable in the first movement, which also makes use of a hidden ternary form. Therefore Ligeti's music in the later 1970s and 1980s can be considered as part of the relatively mainstream postmodernist strand of composition and not especially maverick in its nature.

Kyle Gann has identified a pertinent characteristic in relation to the American mavericks such as Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell and Harry Partch: 'these mavericks were supposed to be loners, dissenters, and individualists, who went their own way ... it turns out that they all knew each other, hung out together, studied with other mavericks, gave concerts together, stole each other's ideas.'³³ This is also true of a 'maverick' like Ligeti who was not a loner and was clearly aware of what his contemporaries were doing—this is evident in the influence they had on aspects of his work. For example, when Ligeti escaped to the West in 1956 he became part of the circle of composers around Stockhausen and Koenig who formed the avant-garde of the time. As Constantin Floros recounts: 'the chief aim of the group, whose art was not understood either by the officials or by the public, was to erect a counter-culture.'³⁴ Later, Ligeti seemed to distance himself from the avant-garde and became more influenced by postmodernist ideas, in spite of his statements condemning such art, for example when he said that 'I am against postmodernism in all the arts, because I reject the restoration of an art that is agreeable and that reaches a great mass of people, who

³¹ Steinitz, 245.

³² Wilson, 12.

³³ Kyle Gann, 'The Longyear Lecture', *American Music*, 26/2 (Summer, 2008), 140–155: 153.

³⁴ Floros, 212.

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utter sighs of relief: “Enough of this Modernism already.”³⁵ It is, however, difficult not to see aspects of postmodernist thinking in all of Ligeti’s music after the composition of *Le grand macabre*.

Some conclusions on Ligeti’s ‘maverick’ nature

The initial question of this article was: is Ligeti to be considered a maverick? It seems that in many respects he is not, but this does not mean that his music is any less significant. Ligeti wrote some of the most wonderfully evocative, compelling and complex music of this period. He was, however, more a creative kleptomaniac than a maverick; stealing or borrowing ideas from all around him to create a new and enchanting language which often transcends the original source. If Ligeti was genuinely a maverick in the mode of a Partch or a Nancarrow, then his music would probably have not reached such a large audience. As a true maverick, he would have ploughed a single furrow, focused solely on writing music using one compositional approach such as micropolyphony, for example. He did focus on this particular compositional technique quite obsessively for a while between the 1960s and early 1970s, however, later he realized that the world was changing around him, and he reacted to this by finding new and fertile modes of expression. This can be heard in his works from the 1980s onwards which explore sub-Saharan rhythms, demonstrate postmodernist reflections on music of the past and the reclaiming of melody and harmony, and show many other influences. So Ligeti was not a true maverick, precisely because his musical language showed a great flexibility and sensitivity to the changing contemporary world around him, becoming richer and more influential as a result.

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³⁵ György Ligeti, interview in *Die Zeit* (28 May 1993), 57, cited in Floros, 213.