

Re: correspondence from well-known composers

No personal computers then, of course.

Since even typewriters could be scarce, or time-consuming to use, most folks wrote letters in longhand.

And they took time to write well, to communicate, because...well, because that was the way of the world then: slower, more considered, more personable, more respectful.

Somehow that makes these letters seem more valuable now.

They embody their times AND their authors - each a great artist in his own way.

George Rochberg was responding to a score I had sent him, along with a request for his advice about what I should focus on as I tried to become a viable composer.

When I imagine the demands on his time then, I'm all the more grateful that he was kind enough to devote such attention to me.

He is generally considered to be an important historical figure.

At a time when writing anything but serial or atonal music was considered passe at best, he - one of the most prominent serialists - made the brave decision to rebel against that particular dogma.

His Third String Quartet (the first work of his new artistic direction) was like a watershed event in the field of contemporary "serious" / art music.

In it, he was saying something that I'd felt all along - that even "serious" music had to communicate to the larger audience, and if it failed to even try to do that, then no one would care about it - and deservedly so!

Rochberg became a hero to many young, aspiring composers like me - and that's why his letters to me meant so much.

I should also say that I actually heard his Third Quartet live at Dickinson College.

He was there...and made some introductory remarks - an absolutely thrilling evening for me.

Even for those who don't really care about contemporary classical music, this quartet is worth a listen.

Really quite approachable - a great statement, by a great (perhaps underappreciated) artist.

March 9, 1975

Dear Mr. Gray,

I'm sorry I have taken
this long to reply. As you
can guess it is a very busy
period for me.

It is so bad that it

do not dept. policy to
advise candidates for admission
who don't make it the reasons
for not accepting them. But
with close to 50 people*
seeking admission & places
for only 10 or so you

* in history - Poetry & Composition

Can I readily understand the
problems that would be involved
in writing detailed explanations, etc.

If you want what so
far as I am possible long
delay in giving you my reactions,
please send your new work &

Will do my best

With every good wish,

Sincerely yours,

John R. Ruckley

GEORGE ROCHBERG
285 ARONIMINK DRIVE
NEWTOWN SQUARE, PA. 19073

May 21, 1975

Dear Mr. Gray,
Thank you for the
new mss of your Autograph
II & especially for your
patience in waiting until I
found some free time to
look it over.

First let me offer
all best wishes for your
success at Cornell. I hope
here you will find the way
to developing your craft

and spreading your wings
as a composer.

Since I know nothing
about your background &
musical experience, it is

as I can guess on my part
that you are strongly oriented
towards & influenced by
recent developments in Jazz.

One is what comes across to
me from the melodic/
harmonic style of your trio.

Whether I'm correct or not,
it seems that you need
to break through the

(3)

GEORGE ROCHBERG
285 ARONIMINK DRIVE
NEWTOWN SQUARE, PA. 19073

Strongly formularized harmonic
cliques you employ. I
would advise a good
dose of work in the
classical / romantic traditions
as well as an investigation
of Bartok, Stravinsky,
Scriabin, Messiaen. This
should help to open
your ears and place
your future work in
relation to the authentic

Language of serious music.

Also I would recommend
very strongly that you
immerse yourself in the
traditions of contrapuntal
thinking. Unfortunately there
is no substitute for real
craftsmanship & discipline &
it all takes iron hours
& tremendous patience coupled
with my hard work.

With every good wish,

Sincerely yours,

Greg Robey