

Lewis Krauthamer

Intro to my musical style

1. Musical background (experimentalism, microtonality)

My music has undergone much change and development through the years. As a conservatory student, I wrote in what might be described as a neo-expressionistic (influenced by such composers as Mahler, Schoenberg and Berg) kind of style. Soon I discovered the experimental composers of the New York School, and though I could never fully embrace the kind of total objectivity as espoused by composers like John Cage, this tradition became my new point of reference. Shortly after moving to France, I began to grow tired of trying to reconcile myself with certain aspects of experimentalism (the self-denial, the highly conjectural and detached world-philosophy); it was around this time that I began to turn to North and South American folk music for inspiration (more on that in the next section – [2. On folk music](#)).

Experimental music has nonetheless continued to impact my music in various ways, and when people ask what kind of music it is I write, the word “experimental” still manages to find its way out of my mouth. An aspect of my music that I would describe as experimental would be the element of indeterminacy with respect to orchestration – many of my scores incorporate instrumental parts which are not written for any specific instrument, leaving much in the choice of sounds/instruments to the discretion of the performer(s). Another aspect that many would probably describe as experimental

(though I would not) is the use of microtonality.

Towards the end of my time in France I began to work in the microtonal 6th-tone scale. I had been a longtime admirer of the great microtonal composer Harry Partch, and as much as I studied and admired his writings on Just Intonation, what appealed to me most about Partch was the depth and poetry of his music itself. My reason for wanting to work with microtones was none other than to allow myself more possibilities, more options than those given to me by the conventional system of 12-Tone-Equal-Temperament. It's easy to see why a painter, if given a palette of 12 predetermined colors, would eventually want to mix the colors together, find different shades, etc. The 6th-tone scale gave me 36 tones to the octave, three times more than in the conventional system; this has allowed me the possibility to work with certain hues found between the tones/“colors” to which we've become so accustomed. As esoteric and technical as such a thing may sound, working in the 6th-tone scale seemed to open the way in my music to a kind of expressive immediacy that I don't think would have otherwise been possible; my musical world became more vivid than ever before.

2. On folk music

When people claim “everything's been done” they're usually referring (whether they realize it or not) to a specific artistic movement, typically one which has gone through various stages, seen its heyday and since lost its steam. The great musical tradition associated with the rise of the European Bourgeoisie (producing such composers as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner) has run its course and been in decline for over a century. By contrast, folk music (music arising from popular traditions, i.e. peoples' music) has at

different times and places begun to develop and thrive; but this progression has always been curbed, appropriated for commercial purposes or at times even overtly sabotaged for political reasons (as in Latin America during the wave of oppressive military dictatorships)-- leaving its full musical potential (in my view) ultimately unrealized.

I have found myself most drawn to Piedmont Blues/Ragtime and to the folk music of South America (mainly from Chile, Uruguay and Argentina). It would be hard for me to explain exactly why these particular styles have appealed to me more than others; I grew up in the Piedmont / East-Coast area and my wife is from Uruguay, so there is definitely a personal connection there (though following that criteria alone I should have also found myself writing Tango / Go-go / Klezmer music). It would be difficult too to explain what particular aspects of my work are influenced by this music and how, since to do so would be to wrongly assume that my music is somehow initially produced *in vacuo*, and then is allowed to be affected by outside elements. I write my music very intuitively; and even though there are concrete structural ways my music may relate to folk music material, there is no conscious effort on my part to make it serve any kind of predetermined agenda. In the end, I hope my music itself offers enough of an explanation of exactly what it is, how, why, etc.