The Music of Josef Tal
Selected Writings

The Israeli Music Archive
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Expression of the Twelve-tone Row
in the Works of Oedoen Partos and Josef Tal

At the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s, following a period of personal and cultural isolation, Israeli composers had the opportunity of going abroad and studying at important music centers. Exposure to musical innovations in the world was to influence the work of many. A perusal of Israeli works composed at the time reveals that many of them are based on innovative techniques. Conspicuous among these are those compositions which make use of the twelve-tone serial technique.

Oedoen Partos and Josef Tal, two of Israel's most important composers, were no different in this respect from their fellows. At the end of the 'fifties and in the early 'sixties they each wrote several works based on a twelve-tone row.

From their earliest years in the country (Josef Tal immigrated in 1934 and Oedoen Partos in 1938), they found they had much in common and collaborated in performances. in 1960 Josef Tal dedicated a sonata for viola and piano to his friend Partos. That same year, the two musicians went together on a tour of Europe playing their compositions.

But each of them had a different approach to the twelve-tone row and each used it in a different way. This is borne out by an examination of the subject in two compositions by the two composers, both of them based on the twelve-tone row: Oedoen Partos's Second String Quartet, "Psalms", and Josef Tal's Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra.

The String Quartet, one of Partos's most important works, was written in 1960. The Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra, one of Tal's outstanding compositions, was completed in 1961. A comparison between the structures of the rows—that on which Partos's quartet is based and that on which Tal's concerto is based—and their expression in the compositions will illustrate the difference in the two composers' approach to the row.
Oedoen Partos: Quartet No. 2

Oedoen Partos's Quartet No. 2 is called "Psalms" (in Hebrew Tehilim) because of its biblical cantillation-like motifs, especially in the second movement. The composer set out with the intention of building his composition on such motifs, and to do so he constructed a row which met his needs (see Example 1):

Example 1: The row in Partos's Quartet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Semitones between 1/2, 2/4, 5/6, 7/10, 9/10, 9/11

 Its important characteristics are:
1) Absence of large intervals, the largest being a fourth.
2) The melody moves in small gradations in a gentle upward line.
3) The predominant intervals are seconds—major and minor.
4) Chromatic progression stands out, though it is sometimes "delayed", coming after a note or two.
5) Most significantly, the row is built on four motifs; that is, it has four groups, a, b, c, d, each having three notes, and each forming a short motif. The motifs are to resemble traditional oriental cantillations.
6) The row is built in a manner which ensures the presence of the motifs in all its forms, inversions and transpositions.

In the quartet, the row appears in all its 48 possible forms, original, derived (O, I, R, RI) and in all transpositions. That is to say, the transpositional relationship (and this is especially noteworthy) is of the minor second. The characteristics of the row are preserved throughout (See Example 2):
Example 2: Transformations of Partos's row

As the quartet progresses, some notes are played in octave doublings while others are repeated before the row has ended; Partos is working with the row in an unorthodox fashion. But more important is the repetition of groups of notes from within the row: his repetition of motifs, vis., groups a, b, c, and d (see Exx. 1 and 2), which make up the row. The significance of this is that Partos's approach—both to construction of the row and to composition of the quartet as a whole—is basically melodic. Avner Bahat quotes Partos himself as saying: "I chose this line for the rich melodic possibilities it offered".5

The following examples from the Quartet serve to illustrate this:

a. Expressions of minor seconds and the chromaticism is vertical. Repetition of single notes and their doubling at the octave, as in the first movement:

Example 3: Minor seconds and vertical chromaticism (O)
b. Expression of motifs c and d, and their repetition, as in the first movement.

Example 4: Repetition of motifs c and d (O)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violin 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violin 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cello</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\text{Example 5: Motifs from the row (O transposed)}
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\[
\text{Example 6: More motifs (O transposed)}
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\text{Example 7: Other motifs (R transposed)}
\]

c. Expression of motifs that constitute the row, as at the beginning of the Allegro in the Violin I.

d. Other examples of the motifs from the row:
Josef Tal: Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra

Josef Tal, as we have said, completed his Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra in 1961. Here, in his use of a twelve-tone row, Tal adopted an approach different from that of Partos. He was looking not for melodic motifs but for chords with special character and color to his taste. He therefore built the row which was to form the basis of his concerto in a way that would answer these needs.

Example 8: The row in Tal's Concerto

```
\begin{align*}
\text{a} & : & \text{b} & : & \text{c} \\
\text{Major 3rds:} & & & & \\
\end{align*}
```

The component most in evidence in the structure of this row is the major third, which appears during the course of the row five times.

The row is presented in the course of the concerto in its Original form (O), in Inversion (I), in Retrograde (R) and in Retrograde Inversion (RI) and in one transposition of each of the above forms: eight derivations of the row in all. All four transpositions are at the interval of a major third:

Example 9: Transformation of Tal's row

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\begin{align*}
\text{O} & : & \text{I} \\
\text{O transposed} & & \text{I transposed} \\
\text{R} & : & \text{RI} \\
\text{R transposed} & & \text{RI transposed} \\
\end{align*}
```
Underpinning the concerto are also a number of rhythmic motifs, the dominant one being built on the major third (or its inversion):

Example 10: Rhythmic motif

![Rhythmic motif](image)

It may also be noted that the interval between the work's opening and closing notes is that of a major third.

Clearly Tal built his row around the major third because that interval was to be a central component of the concerto's overall structure. He also located the major thirds within the row so that he could derive from them the chords he desired. Thus his row is made up of three groups (a, b and c) of four notes each; each group is built on a major third and provides one of the chords he requires (see also Ex. 8):

Example 11: The row grouped

![The row grouped](image)

The row is also expressed melodically as it appears in the rhythmic motif (Ex. 10). But in constructing a row made up of three four-note chords, in classical fashion, in which the major third stands as a basic component, Tal's approach is clearly harmonic; i.e., the main expression of his row displays a primarily vertical sonority.

Following are a number of examples showing the use of chords as organized in the row (a, b, c), played simultaneously or in broken form—examples which testify to the distribution of the row as shown in Ex. 8.
Comparison

Juxtaposing examples of the two twelve-tone rows and comparing their functions in the two works demonstrates the difference of approach between Partos and Tal in these works:

1. The important interval in Partos's row is the minor second, whereas in Tal's it is the major third.
2. Partos's row is built of four three-note groups, each of which forms a melodic motif; Tal's is built of three four-note groups, each group forming a chord.
3. In Partos's Quartet, the row is primarily expressed melodically, whereas in Tal's Concerto the row yields a mainly vertical sonority.
This difference in approach springs from two different musical upbringings. Partos grew up and studied in Budapest and was influenced by Bartók and Kodály;° Tal studied in Berlin and is a product of German musical culture and tradition, strongly influenced by Schoenberg and his school. Moreover, Partos was a violinist and violist, Tal a pianist.

Although each made use of the system in some works during certain periods in their compositional careers, neither Partos nor Tal considered dodecaphony as the only framework for composition. For both Using it changed neither their styles nor their musical outlooks. On the contrary: each designed and constructed his row in accord with his own particular musical qualities and inclinations.

Notes

2. My intention here is not to analyze all the parameters of each work but to deal with the structure and expressions of the row.
4. The work was composed also in homage to Arnold Schoenberg and his "Kol Nidrei" Quartet No. 4.
6. Ibid. The works of both Bartók and Kodály are based on popular melodic motives, as is Parto's row. Furthermore, both of these composers demonstrate a strong melodic bent in their compositions. Bartók said of his friend: "Kodály's compositions are characterized in the main by rich melodic invention" (The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, v. 10, pp. 139-140).
7. Ron, "Tal", pp. 37-50. The movement of blocks of sound constitutes an important element in Schoenberg's works. In some works (e.g., the "Variations", Op. 31), he constructs a row made up of three sections of four notes each. Alban Berg also built rows with this structure, as in his "Lyric Suite".
8. See Bahat, Partos, and Ron, "Tal", passim.