

# PAIDEVMA



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## Chêng Ming: A New Paideuma

. . . Frobenius uses the term Paideuma for the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period . . . The Paideuma is not the Zeitgeist, thou I have no doubt many people will try to sink it in the latter romantic term . . . I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action . . . Mencius Epistemology starts from this verse: the men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart then acting, first set up good government in their own states; wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their own families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their hearts they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts (the tones given off by the heart); wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set to extend their knowledge to the utmost. This completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories. When things had been classified in organic categories, knowledge moved toward fulfillment; given extreme knowable points, the inarticulate thoughts were defined with precision (the sun's lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally). Having attained this precise verbal definition (aliter, this sincerity), they then stabilized their hearts, they disciplined themselves; having attained self-discipline, they set their own houses in order; having order in their homes, they brought good government to their own states; and when their states were well governed, the empire was brought into equilibrium. From the Emperor, Son of Heaven, down to the common man, singly and all together, this self-discipline is the root—i.e. the paideuma.

Cover: A mosaic of Neptune Triumphant with his consort, Amphitrite, surrounded by his subjects. Louvre.

STEPHEN ADAMS

*Ezra Pound and Music* by R. Murray Schafer  
*New Directions*, 530 pages, \$42

Even the most devoted Poundian might be startled by the size of this book. True, the number of reviews signed by William Atheling in the *New Age* must have struck any user of Donald Gallup's Bibliography, not to mention the many musical articles printed in the Rapallo paper *Il Mare*. Pound's small book *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, which has been available in reprint for several years, is included here. Also a number of miscellaneous articles and reviews. But who would have guessed that Pound's collected writings on music would run to more than five-hundred well-filled pages? Murray Schafer has performed the service of disentangling all of Pound's musical writings from the welter of his other interests, and this volume benefits from the editor's nearly twenty years of familiarity with this material. The bulk of the book alone demonstrates that music was a central interest of Pound, not a minor enthusiasm, as it has usually been regarded. *Ezra Pound and Music* probably represents the most important single body of Pound's previously uncollected prose.

Pound's music criticism falls into four well-defined periods. Up to 1917, he published little besides some notices of Arnold Dolmetsch and an early statement on the relationship between music and text in song. Then suddenly, from 1917 to 1920, Pound became William Atheling, regular music editor for A.R. Orage's *New Age*, while at the same time writing art criticism as B.H. Dias and other articles under his own name—plus some of his most important creative work. These reviews form the largest, and to me most intriguing block of text: though written hurriedly, they show Pound actively applying his theoretical principles to the realities of the London concert stage. The Paris period centres on Pound's relation to George Antheil and the effort to compose *Le Testament*. In Rapallo, Pound was occupied with the concert series given by Olga Rudge, Gerhart Munch, and assisting musicians; organizing the concerts to his own taste, Pound explained his ideas to the local audience in *Il Mare* while publicizing his successes in

little magazines abroad like the *Delphian Quarterly* and Ronald Duncan's *Townsmen*.

Schafer's introductions to each of these groups do more than sketch general historical context: they also contribute an amount of original spade-work, especially fresh biographical material about Pound and friends like Walter Rummel, George Antheil, and the elusive Olga Rudge. For Olga Rudge, who figures prominently in these pages, Pound cites independent reviews of her violin recitals and offers a list of her publications; the list of Antheil's early writings, too, is required reading for anyone pursuing Pound's musical ideas. Everywhere Schafer is ready with the information needed to illuminate the text. In addition to an index full enough to be really useful, he includes a glossary of names, many of them performers long forgotten; beyond what is gathered for convenience from standard musical references, much of this material derives from sources close to Pound, like the material on Agnes Bedford (to whom the book is dedicated) or Raymonde Collignon. Schafer's notes trace the many difficult allusions in the *Antheil* text. Where necessary, he corrects the errors in Pound's physics or reports that "this remark is uninformed" (260); but apart from an occasional self-indulgence (like the swipe at Ernest Bloch on p. 263), he keeps his matter discreetly subordinated to Pound's text.

The reader primarily interested in Pound will perhaps be most interested in the theoretical concepts. Pound has a good deal to say about lyric verse here, and everywhere he adopts a magisterial attitude towards questions of rhythm. His theory of "Great Bass" is mainly an effort to turn rhythm from a local effect to a large-scale controlling force; Schafer includes as an appendix a chronological review of Pound's developing theories (which formerly appeared in *Paideuma*, Vol. 2, no. 1). But these reviews of course touch on all of Pound's interests, artistic and social, and they are filled with revealing *obiter dicta*. For example, we learn here and nowhere else, I think, Pound's estimation of Emily Dickinson (it was low).

The musician who turns to this book will be struck, even annoyed by the literary bias of Pound's views—the primacy of the text in song, the preference for song over opera, for vocal music over instrumental. He will find if he is patient, however, that Pound's opinions become gradually more musicianly, evolving into a taste for Bartok and (as early as 1936) Vivaldi. The musician-reader may also recognize the quirk of taste that admires most music before Beethoven and after Debussy but despises everything

between; such a bias, which now seems *passé*, was almost unheard of in Pound's generation. The musician-reader may be at times outraged: "The aesthetic pleasure of hearing Bruno Walter play Mozart is about what one would derive from seeing a bust of Mozart carved in a sausage" (398). Before scorning Pound's judgment, one should consider Stravinsky's comment on the same conductor's recorded rehearsal of the *Linz* Symphony: "[Walter] is continually heard inviting the orchestra to 'sing,' while he never invites it to 'dance.' The result of this is that the music's simple melodic content is burdened with a thick-throated late-nineteenth-century sentiment that it cannot bear, while the rhythmic movement remains turgid."<sup>1</sup> In music as in literature, Pound anticipated tastes that prevailed after him.

In this respect, Schafer makes high claims for Pound as a music theorist. Not many musicians would agree that "the total number of contributions to the science of harmony in our century is three" (293), naming Pound along with Schönberg and Heinrich Schenker. Heady company indeed for the "Treatise on Harmony"! The claim seems extravagant, though Schafer reiterates it from his ground-breaking article of 1961 on Pound's music.<sup>2</sup> But then, musicians have paid too little attention to the relationship between harmony, timbre, and musical time; where Schenker, looking backward, based his theory on tonal harmony, and Schönberg developed a new way of organizing pitch, Pound attempts to make rhythm the basis of musical form, and his ideas show a remarkable, if coincidental, resemblance to Stockhausen's thoughts on the subject.<sup>3</sup>

None of this is to deny Pound's obvious amateurishness or his patches of ignorance. No musician would mistake the metronome markings in *Figaro* for Mozart's, and the confusion of "raga" and "tala" (terms probably picked up from Tagore) is enough to make any musicologist skeptical. Furthermore, the pages reproduced from Pound's notebooks showing his efforts to learn medieval notation from the pages of the Lavnac *Encyclopédie* betray the shaky musical script of a bare beginner. But Pound's readers know that the errors, while they cannot be ignored, are the price paid for concepts retrieved from distant reaches of learning.

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1. Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), p. 128.

2. "Ezra Pound and Music," *Canadian Music Journal*, 5 (1961), pp. 15-43.

3. See "The Concept of Unity in Electronic Music," *Perspectives of New Music*, 1 (1962), pp. 39-48.

Pound's pre-Atheling articles show his leading ideas already well formed. He was inevitably attracted to Arnold Dolmetsch, already a London celebrity before 1900. And Pound's study of the troubadours had convinced him that the practise of printing lyric poetry apart from music had crippled the English art of melopoeia. What does not emerge clearly enough from these pages is the influence of a non-musician—Yeats. Notoriously unmusical, Yeats had nonetheless advanced ideas that appealed to Pound about the primacy of the text in song. Yeats's experiments with recitations to the psaltery (built for him by Dolmetsch), and even more, the minimal music that he liked for his dance plays (some of it written by Pound's friend Rummel) directly influenced Pound's conception of *Le Testament* as a stage work incorporating Noh conventions, with masks, stylized acting, and music strictly subordinated to Villon's words. The same concepts reappear in Pound's version of Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*.

The Atheling reviews are the most entertaining portion of this book. At their best, they show Pound in process of shaping formal principles that stand behind his work; the insight is frankly that of a musical amateur with an axe to grind, but the constructive criticism is a good deal more explicit than the usual tepid applause of Pound's colleagues; the destructive criticism is often hilarious. "Winifred Macbride presented Bach with blurs and with a general suburbanity" (186); "there is no particular limit to the number of people who might have written this Sonata" (106); "if there is any worse song-setter than Walford Davies . . . he ought to be stuffed down a drain, and there held by the trousers until dead of the odour" (198). The comedy alone deserves to make these reviews as popular as George Bernard Shaw's. But the true rewards of the Atheling criticism, as of Shaw's, arise from the effort to cajole an intransigent public into new standards of value.

Pound's publicity campaign for George Antheil had better chances for success in the Paris of the 1920's, but it notoriously backfired. Pound has been blamed for the failure, notably by Antheil himself, but Schafer shows Antheil as a willing participant, sniping at Stravinsky for personal reasons while borrowing liberally from his scores. Pound, who had heard little advanced music in London, was (unlike the experienced critics of *La Revue Musicale*) somewhat mistaken in Antheil's originality, but the talent was genuine enough. Antheil was a first-rate musician. He produced some significant music before his illness (apparently a nervous collapse) in 1927, not only the *Ballet Mécanique*, but also

the three violin sonatas written for Olga Rudge (these have now been recorded, Orion ORS 73119, and they are worth hearing). Pound's book on Antheil and the related writings collected here form a valuable and little understood post-script to earlier Vorticist documents like *Gaudier-Brzeska*.

The Rapallo articles are important, if for no other reason than that they enlarge the tiny body of Pound's writings of the 1930's that have been rescued from nearly inaccessible Italian sources. These articles are less remarkable in content than the Atheling reviews, but they reveal how much Pound's mind was occupied with music during these years. The major discovery was Vivaldi, and Pound together with Olga Rudge made important contributions to his restoration; but the Rapallo concerts covered plenty of unexplored territory, from William Young and the Italian lutenists on one hand, to Hindemith and Tibor Serly on the other. Pound boasted of his concerts as an example of "what the small town can do" (332), and as an "application of Douglasite principles to a concrete situation in space and time" (374); but while not every small town has a cache of unexamined masterpieces near at hand, nor musicians like Olga Rudge and Gerhart Munch to play them, the concerts were a uniquely Poundian venture.

Murray Schafer has been associated with Pound's music ever since his article of 1961 and his 1962 production of *Le Testament* for the B.B.C. Behind his musical judgment stands a reputation as the foremost avant-garde composer in Canada. As editor, Schafer puts the Poundian case on all of the areas where music impinges on poetry; but of course many questions go unanswered. Schafer makes the standard claims for the subtlety of Pound's ear, but no one, I think, has yet explained the poet's rhythms. Since Hugh Kenner's suggestion years ago,<sup>4</sup> no one has demonstrated how "Great Bass" applies to the *Cantos*, or whether it does. And despite Schafer's case (pages 16-18), and *pace* William McNaughton in *Paideuma* VI, 2, I fail to see what the word "fugue" adds to an understanding of the intricacies of Pound's verbal structures. The analogy seems to me limited and, what is worse, pretentious. (I have voiced the negative argument elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>) But there is great truth in Schafer's charge: "the most disappointing thing about the bulk of criticism dealing with Ezra Pound is that music has not been given the attention it deserves" (ix). After the publication of

4. *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1951).

5. "Are the *Cantos* a Fugue?" *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 45 (1975), pp. 67-74.

*Ezra Pound and Music*, there is less excuse for this state of affairs than ever. Only one thing is still needed: the music itself. Though we have a good performance of Pound's first opera on recording, the general appreciation of Pound's music cannot proceed until New Directions brings out Volume Two, the scores of *Le Testament* and *Cavalcanti*.



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