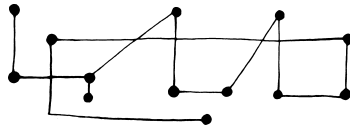


IN CELEBRATION—ERB AT 90:†

ON HER WRITING AS COMPOSING, IMPROVISING, AND
WONDERING—IN AND THROUGH MUSIC, SOUNDTEXTS,
GRAPHIC NOTATIONS, IMAGES, COLLAGES, LISTENING
PORTRAITS, SOUNDPLAYS, IMPRESSIONS, ESSAYS,
REVIEWS, AND NOTES-IN-PROGRESS



MARIANNE KIELIAN-GILBERT

HOW TO CHARACTERIZE A LIFETIME of music-making, writing, and reflexive inquiry? Such a task, though impossible, is also my delight and honor on the occasion of celebrating composer-theorist-artist Elaine Barkin’s 90th birthday.¹ In what follows, I trace a few motives and continuities in her writings as music-making-in-play.²

ELAINE BARKIN, AMERICAN COMPOSER-THEORIST-TEACHER
(MUSICSOUND AND MODALITIES)

In different modalities, mediums/media, and registers of address, Barkin’s creative writings in and of music bring to life the multidimensionality

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of and in her—and potentially our—encounters with music. Her analyses, reviews and interviews, descriptive-reflective texts, musically poetic and visual portraits, are as much (*musicsound*) compositions as written improvisatory soundplays, narratives, and performances. They may not mean to be easily separated, yet their modal distinctions are crucial to their character.

Foremost in her pioneering work, Barkin's attention and priority to palpable "*musicsound*" and *soundings* in her composed and improvised music serve as evolving sonic playlists and backdrops for and of her writings (and vice versa).³ We witness her sensitivity to different and multiple frameworks of conception and reception, and to fluidities among text, context, perception, and reflection.

Her texts and soundtexts crisscross, interconnected and reciprocal. Connections between written anthologies and OPEN SPACE audio recordings become thematic, morphing in and between different modes of presentation, as for example in "*past is part of*" as: *Text, 1984*; *Tapemix 1985* (a meditation); and Part V of *5 Collages 1992* (a 6'46" four-track tape collage on an original text).⁴

Her readers—as co-listener-perceivers, participants, and learners—encounter processes of experiencing how one who composes and writes, and one who reads and listens, can inhabit multiple and fluid positions—not simply in active-passive relationships but in touching (in) between each other and among varying musical worlds and aural environments.⁵

Barkin offers, I'd say, revolutionary, "analytical" and "compositional" responses that have deepened practices of both music analyst-theorists and composers. Her writings put forward characterizations that do not simply substitute less formidable meanings for formidable-technical ones. They suspend a hierarchy between subordinate and dominant (performative or compositional) readings to allow for experience as outside of or decentered from institutionally positioned narratives (i.e., eschewing epic narratives, questioning pre-existent or received notions of "music" apart from thought and experience).

Relatedly, alternate modalities of apprehension open and interconnect in Barkin's rendering: her *Igor's Goriest Tune* (1982) extends a set of intuitions and collection of image-graphic-texts and aural impressions—of/in the bassoon solo marking the beginning and end of the *Rite of Spring* Introduction.⁶ Her poetic renderings show how what appears at first glance as an open-ended free associative jumble of "images" for the Stravinsky passage, both depicts the potentials of its music-sound-play and upends deep-seated notions of self-importance (elitism) of music's autonomy and its status in the academy.⁷

ELAINE BARKIN, LISTENING, IMAGING
(ASSOCIATIVE PLAY AND POETRY AS NECESSITY)

As feminist poet and writer Audre Lorde (1984) has stated: “*For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence . . . first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.*”⁸

What may be construed as the “free associativity” (and poetry!) in and of Barkin’s writings and responses becomes an eclectic play of juxtapositions, connections, and superpositions that presents the characterizing possibilities and potentials of inhabiting the individual and intersubjective, social-cultural, historical, and aesthetic worlds. (“Poetry” as a means of venturing and risking—characterizing and thinking through musical play through touching and exchange [rather than substitution, replacement, or representation of one for one], entwining aspects, of both in each). Elaine is deeply aware of the stakes for educational practices in undertaking the music work she does and in living life in and through music.

The necessity of poetry—figuring, honing and analogically extending, trying on for fit . . . deepening and sharing via musings, notes, marginalia, asides, and accumulation—is crucial to the richness of what it’s like to do music, work with music sound, think through it, and characterize the sonic textures and depth of music’s creative and constructive practices.

ELAINE BARKIN, LISTENER AS INTERLOCUTOR, IN “CONVERSATION”
(AFFINITIES AND DISAGREEMENTS)

In Elaine’s writings readers encounter an amazing variety and number of musical interlocutors (composers, writers, creators) with whom she “converses,” characterizing affinities (or disagreements!) through written, graphic notation, and music-sound listening impressions, portraits, diaries, reviews, and evocative descriptions.

Early essays on Webern’s orchestral piece “Bewegt” (1913) (and Debussy etude, *pour les sixtes*, see *e: an anthology*) hint toward various *modus operandi*: Barkin makes a series of sketches (or graphic notations) developing music-theoretical intuitions for rehearsal directions in performance, hearing-listening, and (re)composition. This process follows her encountering the readings and sketches of “Bewegt” by

theorists Roy Travis and Allen Forte and finding them “not adaptable” to her hearings. In her Webern “analysis,” musical-aural/sonic intuitions key to focused sketches (and vice versa) that can be approached as, or like palimpsests accumulating comprehensible pathways into a piece (listening for a way in, so as to get into the music).

Barkin’s lisible (writerly and poetic) engagements alter the perception of text and music as self-contained and recast the topography of musical perception in intertextual fragments, juxtapositions, and refusals of completion. Often temporally improvisatory, they eschew perfection and open the authorial text to the discursive and relational worlds of others, friends, and companions. The partial sampling of her writings noted below attempts to characterize the multiplicity of musical texts and topics for, on, and about, and of ways of conjuring compositional processes, soundworlds, evocative listening experiences, and worldly extensions.⁹

ELAINE BARKIN, WOMAN COMPOSER
(SELF-AWARENESS AND IDENTITY [UN]CONSCIOUSNESS)

As feminist poet, writer, and critic, Virginia Woolf (1931) has stated: “*The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist’s state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over.*”¹⁰

In living-listening inside and outside, one senses that questioning boundaries and searching are part and parcel of a life in music and a musical life, and part and parcel of a creative life.

Barkin’s well-known extended reflective essay-diaries such as “Rules of One’s Own (1993/97)” and “either / other (1992)” —both in *e: an anthology*—wrestle with implications and distinctions of self (and group), in experience (and reflection). Like Woolf’s concern with one’s own spaces, these essays respond to distinct challenges that composers / women composers confront (with)in creative (un)consciousness and self-awareness. They highlight the stakes of centering oneself in spaces inside and/or outside (self- and/or group-) awareness.

The backdrop and counterpoint of Barkin’s reflective writing emerge from ongoing creative activities in and of communities of music making, thinking, and listening, and in her notable efforts to include multiple voices—of women composers, writers, and theorists. Elaine’s “questionnaire (1981),” questions assumptions about gender roles and what a woman (composer) “is” and “does”; nineteen women composers responded to her invitation to publish in *Perspectives of New Music*.¹¹

Barkin has continued to explore these and related questions on individuality and identity: in 1987 she outlined and scheduled a class on Music by and of American Women from 1950 to the present, then canceled the course. Her writings incorporate the complexities of necessity and those in play—“That woman is not man is far easier to say than what music is or is not or can or cannot be” (*e*: 125–26)—and encompass both questions of (gender) identity and music.

How does, or can, doing, thinking about, or sharing music lend insights to questions about identity and centering awareness? How, or might, one reconcile (?) one’s distinct musical involvement and consciousness within a piece (getting inside the music) with the critical distance that notices and requires distinctions, articulation, and flow?

ELAINE BARKIN, CONJUNCTIONS, AFFINITIES, INTER-CULTURALITIES
(MASKS AND THE MASKED)

In her essays “Crosscultural Musings” (1989, *e*: 143) and “Conjunctions and Affinities” (on masks and collecting, 2003, *e*²: 89), traversing inter-cultural musical landscapes is to be willing to be bewildered and discomfited, “shook-up” and “elated,” and to navigate dimensions of both reciprocity and takeover, ever noticing and feeling the sparks and connections in encountering, collaborating, collecting, quilting, and collaging.

Elaine’s insight: the processes of masking and being masked have potentials to reflect as well as to become performatively expressive!¹² Our masks can be the means to try on, to become an-other, and to collaborate in interactive music-making.

Trying on, and living, the potential poly-hood of inter-cultural encounters—theorizing masks and the masked, with their distinctive expressivities and means to animate performance—Elaine’s studies and travels led to Bali, Java, and Japan, and to over three decades of collaborative explorations in intercultural teaching, improvising, and composing.

Over the 1980s and 1990s, participating in UCLA’s Javanese and Balinese gamelan ensembles inspired her intense study of new music for Indonesian gamelan. Collaborative endeavors, teaching a course about contemporary and world music, and directing a Gamelan Angklung ensemble “during a semester at sea somewhere in the Pacific Ocean” (1996, talk in *e*²: 39) led to dialoging with Indonesian composers, forming and participating in UCLA’s Experimental Workshop, and developing interactive music-making projects with UCLA’s Gamelan Ensemble.

As we celebrate Elaine Radoff Barkin's work, writings, and music at 90, we cheer and toast a remarkable composer, performer, improviser, writer-theorist, music listener, and graphic-sound artist. Her prismatic approach to music as a way of life and work continues to delight, enrich, hearten, and teach—illuminating musical worlds where we can live and which “can help us, and those with whom we all are in touch, discover sanity and purpose and wonder and community” and “be more fully conscious of every moment of our lives.”¹³

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NOTES

1. I have been and continue to be a beneficiary of Elaine's influence and work as teacher (since University of Michigan days in the early 1970s), mentor and friend (in and outside the academy), guide to various listening-theoretical (and compositional) pursuits, and long-time member of the creative community of *Perspectives of New Music*.
2. This brief essay draws on several compilations of texts spanning Barkin's work over half a century: *e: an anthology [music texts & graphics (1975-1995) and endpaper by Benjamin Boretz]*, OPEN SPACE, 1997; and *e2 anthology: "Are we nearly there?" (music texts and graphics)*, ed. Mark So, OPEN SPACE, 2020. For an autobiographical account of her work as co-editor of *Perspectives of New Music* (from 1972–85), see "Telling it SLANT or in Search of the Early Years," also in *e2*, 2020). The UCLA Library Special Collections and online archives house her musical compositions and papers, 1955–2010.
3. See in particular: Elaine Barkin—*5 Collages*, OPEN SPACE 3 (1992), and especially her three CD audio anthology *ee2* (2000): a sound album by elaine barkin (sounds words music collages) in OPEN SPACE CD12 (2019): *Soundtext for Jim Randall* produced by Mary Lee Roberts, 2000.
4. See *5 Collages* (OPEN SPACE CD3, produced by Brad Garton, 1992), Part V. The text of the sound-collage, "On the way" ["On the way to becoming we most of us try others on"]—first published in *Perspectives of New Music* 23/1—appears in *e: an anthology* (116) and as Part I of *5 Collages*. Her ". . . typescript. . . (on J.K. Randall)" (May–October 1990), from a talk given at the Society for Music Theory National Conference in 1990 (see *e2*, 27) appears on OPEN SPACE 40 (2019): *jkr bab erb*, "Soundtext for Jim Randall."
5. Also see Barkin's improvisatory-like and precisely notated 1991 composition "exploring the rigors of in between," [3'02"], for flute, horn in F, violin, viola, violoncello, OPEN SPACE CD12 (2000): *ee2*, produced by Mary Lee Roberts] and discussion in "Rules of One's Own" (*e*: 189–90).
6. "Tongue in cheek," the first six images present the "black-note" restatement of the tune at the end of the *Rite* Introduction at

Rehearsal 12, rather than the tune at the start (the “white-note” version), and give a pun-like twist to the image titled “in my beginning is the end” in the middle! These and similar details throughout her “writings” are emblematic of composing ways to “integrate several ‘expressive languages,’ the more so with a ‘tune’ that had been one of my earliest New Music experiences.” See her description and dedication of IGT highlighted in “*Igor’s Goriest Tune* and selected text pieces” also reprinted in *Current Musicology*, No. 95 (Spring 2013), in a special issue titled “Experimental Writing About Music,” edited by David Gutkin.

7. Also see *e: an anthology*, 1997. Visual, graphic, textual, and musical renderings also combine with similar affect in Barkin’s “analyses” of Schoenberg’s *Little Piano Pieces*, Op. 19, nos. 2 (“a song of Ing”) and 6 (“play it AS it lays”).
8. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press feminist series. Trumansburg, N.Y. Crossing Press, 1984, 24–27.
9. A “sampling”—texts for, on, and about: Ben Boretz (2004, “O”; 2005–06, “6 collages for Ben”; 2013, Liner Notes); Georgia Dobrée (1988, 2017, “. . . out of the air . . .,” midi piece); Barbara Dolgin Walden (2012, “Tune for Bobbie”); Ron M. George (2006, “Moving On”); Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (2000, a “history,” *Conch Shell Suite*); Harry Partch (1987); Alexandra Pierce (1992, *Dance: a sentence*); J.K. Randall (1990, typescript; 2019, soundtext) Thomas Ades (2009); Milton Babbitt (1989, *Sextets*; 2004, *Groupwise*); Arthur Berger (1978, post impressions, *Trio*); John Cage (1993); David Dunn (2000); Virginia Gaburo (2005, a dedication, *Notation*); Diamanda Galás (1993, *Plague Mass*); Robert Morris (2014, Liner Notes); Pauline Oliveros (1984); John Rahn (2019, sound portrait, *Kalí*); Karen Rehnqvist (2001, *Davids Nimm*); Galina Ustvolskaya (2001).

Conjuring compositional processes, soundworlds, evocative listening experiences, and worldly extensions:

Halfway in, cello sustains high B for almost 2 minutes, long drawn bows and radiant shivers, cello mesmerized by the sound of its voice, these rare, held moments the other side of the obsessing pounding coin. . . . [Ustvolskaya’s music:] it’s like the so-called fruit of the cholla cactus bush, whose jointed segments detach easily, whose hard-to-remove spines pierce the skin and draw blood through your footwear” (describing movement 5 of Ustvolskaya’s Grand Duet for cello and piano (1959), and her music, e²: 77–78).

10. Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*. London: The Women's Press, Harcourt 1979, ed. Michèle Barrett. Text from Woolf's essay and 1931 lecture "Professions for Women," 61–62.
11. See "In Response," *Perspectives of New Music* 20/1–2 (Autumn, 1981–Summer, 1982), 288–329.
12. See Barkin's essays in anthologies *e*, *e*², and *A Sound Album by Elaine Barkin* (Open Space CD12, 2000) 12), as well as the descriptions of John O. Robison ("Indonesian Influences in the Music of Elaine Barkin," *The Open Space Magazine*, vol. 17/18, 2015, 172–85), for her nine Indonesian compositions and her impact as intercultural teacher, improviser, and composer.
13. "Rules of One's Own", in *e*²: *Are we already there?*, 194, final line; and "Conjunctions and Affinities" in *e*², 98, final line.