

CHAPTER 5
ANTI-COLLECTIVIST CHARACTERISTICS IN DENISOV'S MUSIC

Characteristics of Denisov's Music

The musical style, structure, and language in Edison Denisov's works demonstrate an inherent anti-collectivism, the compositional ingredients, outlined by Kholopov and Tsenova, of "sublime lyricism, viscous stream of several voices, shooting or pricking staccatos, pointillistic splashes, and sporadic static tone clusters,"¹ share an underlying polyphony, characterized by avoidance of melodic and rhythmic unity. Denisov's "viscous streams" exhibit extreme polyphony where simultaneous voices share no common rhythmic ratio (subdivision), adding a dimension to the texture. This characteristic trait appears in the opening movement of the *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes* (1989) where polyrhythmic melodies are spun out without an ensemble tutti for 75 measures. This characteristic appears in the earlier *Penitence* (1970), with multiple individual string parts entering individually. The absence of homophonic rhythm and a common beat division in this dodecaphonic opening characterize the performers as individuals playing coincidentally, rather than as a coherent ensemble. Rhythmic coincidence of individuals rather than the governance of individuals by uniform meter is a representative trait of anti-collectivist musical style. Performers are free to interpret and

¹ Kholopov and Tsenova, 51.

interact without specific metric subdivision within the score, establishing freedom which yields cooperatively (rather than collectively)² to the homophonic texture in measure 76. (see Example 3)

Example 3. *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes, I. Tranquillo.*

To depict antagonism between individual voices, labeled ‘Shooting’ or ‘pricking’ dots by Kholopov and Tsenova, Denisov precisely notates sharply-accented staccato pitches, often followed by pointillistic rhythms. This state of maximum individuality is

² Both terms can be defined similarly: “working together toward a common good,” however, “collective” implies action by an outside “collector” or construct.

punctuated by moments of silence after which the agitated voices compete again. Viscous streams are often interspersed between the staccatos acting as contrast to the argumentative texture. The finales of the *Quatre Pièces pour flûte et piano* of 1977 (Example 4) and the *Trio pour flûte, basson et piano* of 1995 (Example 5) feature this dramatic interplay.

Example 4. *Quatre Pièces pour flûte et piano, IV. Agitato.*

Example 5. *Trio pour flûte, basson et piano, II. Allegro moderato.*

106

5:4 *pp* *leggiero* *pp*

5:4 5:4 5:4

7:8 7:8 7:8

pppp *pp* *ppp*

(senza Red.)

109

3

pp *pp*

3

pp *ppp* 9:8 9:8

Red. 9:8

5:4

112

fr. 3

p *pp* 9:8 9:8

fr. 3

p *pp* 7:8 7:8 7:8

3

ppp *pp* 9:8 *pp*

Red. Red.

Denisov creates homophonic polytonal textures using complimentary sets, supersets, or subsets of dodecaphonic and nondodecaphonic sets.³ This freedom of set usage maintains the integrity of the individual voices during chorale and *Klangfarbenmelodie* passages. The chorale featured in the opening movement to the *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes* (Example 6) illustrates this harmonic feature.

Example 6. *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes*, I. Tranquillo.

Denisov uses this texture in the *Variations sur un Thème de Mozart* of 1990 (Example 7) with each voice providing a separate melodic variation within heterophonic and homophonic textures.

³ Denisov uses free dodecaphonic organization similar to Russian serialist composer Nicolai Roslavetz (1881-1944). Roslavetz uses different sets within a work and freely transposes using pivotal note connections between sets. See George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, 6th ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 43-44.

Example 7. *Variations sur un Thème de Mozart*, mesures 108-9.

Denisov's lyric writing is characterized by melodies performed in an instrument's upper register at soft dynamic levels. Often the melodies are to be performed as harmonics or with muted instruments, as in the first movement of the *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes* (Example 8). Again, the individuality of the melodic line is paramount as the melodies in both polyphonic and homophonic texture remain rhythmically and harmonically independent.

Example 8, *Quatuor pour flûte et cordes. I. Tranquillo*, m. 149-160.

The image displays a musical score for a quartet, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system begins at measure 149 and includes a *pp* dynamic marking. The second system starts at measure 153, and the third system starts at measure 157. The score is written for a flute and string quartet, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The music is in a tranquil style, as indicated by the tempo marking *Tranquillo*.

Origins of Denisov's Anti-Collectivist Style
The *Sonata for Flute and Piano* (1960)

The *Sonata for Flute and Piano*, written in 1960, displays anti-collectivist characteristics of rhythmic and melodic independence in a polytonal setting. Denisov's staccato pointillism and "viscous streams" gestures are present in embryonic form. A bitonal introduction (B-flat minor/D-minor) leads to an eleven-note tone row in the right hand of the piano, followed by the first presentation of a multi-rhythmic contrapuntal 'viscous stream' on beats 4 and 5 of measure four.

Example 9. *Sonata for flute and piano*, measures 1-4.

The image shows a musical score for measures 1-4 of the Sonata for Flute and Piano. The score is written for Flöte (Flute) and Klavier (Piano). The tempo is marked 'Lento espressivo' with a quarter note equal to 50 (♩ = 50). The key signature is B-flat minor/D minor. The flute part begins with a melodic arpeggiation in D minor, marked 'mp' and 'mf'. The piano part begins with a bitonal accompaniment in B-flat minor/D minor, marked 'p'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

The contrapuntal texture returns to the opening heterophonic chordal accompaniment (this time in a D-flat/G-flat bitonality) to the flute's melodic arpeggiation (in D minor). The piano maintains harmonic and rhythmic support until measure 12 where a two-voice canon leads to another primordial 'viscous stream' in measure 14. From measure 15 to 25, the heterophonic texture contains a precursor to the lyric figures that Denisov writes

in his mature works. This flute melody at a mezzo piano and pianissimo dynamic deviates rhythmically from the chordal accompaniment using metric instead of ratio subdivision.

Structurally, the three-movement *Sonate* is through-composed with the second movement concluding with a recapitulation of the first movement. Denisov's bitonal problem (B-flat minor tonality versus the D major tonality) is reconciled in favor of B-flat minor. The flute's C-sharp to D trill in the opening is rationalized enharmonic to D-flat in measures 161-164. Statements of C-sharp occur in measures 27-28, 37-38, 58-62, and 154-156 dividing the movements into an overall sonata-allegro form with the development occurring at the second movement (measure 63) and the recapitulation in measure 141. Denisov's choice of the title *Sonata* serves a twofold purpose: as a descriptor of the slow-fast-slow movement scheme and designation of the overall form. In this manner, Denisov stresses formal organization of the overall work rather than repose of tonality within the movement(s). Despite the simple bitonality and rhythmic variance, in contrast to later mature works, the overall characteristics of independence of instruments, formal organization, and tonal language⁴ classify the work as a "formalist" composition.

⁴ The Soviet listener at this time was accustomed to more tonal works including: Kabalevsky's *Spring*, *Symphonic Poem for Orchestra*, Shostakovich's *String Quartets*, Nos. 7 and 8, or Taktakishvili's opera *Mindiya*.

Prélude et Air (1961), “A Soviet Artist’s Reply. . . ?”

This work in Denisov’s catalog is a paradox when viewed in relation to the *Sonate pour flûte et piano* of the previous year and to his later works. Furthermore, the lack of progressive material and stylistic gestures found in the *Sonate* is replaced by diatonic melodies, traditional notation and rhythm, homophonic and heterophonic textures in a polytonal and polymodal neo-classical work. Is the work easily-digestible for those in power in the Composers Union or simply a “character piece” written for a specific occasion such as an examination or convocation?

Despite Denisov’s minimal use of progressive tonal language and lack of rhythmic diversity, his characteristic independence of melodic voices remains in the *Prélude*. The flute and right hand voice in the keyboard, each written in different modes, cadence to the tonic with the left hand of the piano in measures 3, 12, 14, 24, and 27. Cadences to the submediant are outlined by the melodic contour of the bass line, occurring in measures 5, 9, 16, which together with the cadences to the tonic establish the tonality in C major. The movement is constructed of four phrases: m. 1-12, 12-18, 18-22, 22-23, and a coda: measures 24-27. This structure yields phrase lengths of 12, 7, 5, 2, and 4 measures, respectively.⁵ Excluding the coda, the phrases exhibit an additive arithmetic series similar

⁵ Taking in account the integer value (12, 18, 22) of the measures where the tonic appears inclusive of the phrase itself. Measure 24 is not grouped in the phrase beginning in measure 22 because there is no bass movement by perfect fourth, or minor second - the bass moves by minor third (E-flat to C).

to that of Fibonacci.⁶ Considering Denisov's background in mathematics, this proportional phrase structure tightly organizes and dictates the brevity of the movement.

The polymodality and polytonality between the voices of the *Prélude* occur in various combinations at a distance of a major or minor second. In the opening, the C major tonality is established by both voices of the piano, and the flute enters at the supertonic level (D) and progresses through the mediant, supertonic, tonic, leading, and submediant while the right hand moves from the subdominant, mediant, supertonic, to the mediant, in contrary motion (Example 10).

⁶ Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci (c. 1171-1230) discovered a numeric summation series closely approximating that of the golden mean. The series generates each successive number by adding the previous two: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, etc.

Example 10. *Prélude et Air. I. Allegro*, measures 1-4.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 1 and 2. The Flute part (top staff) plays a melodic line with a 'pp' dynamic marking. The Piano part (bottom staves) plays a rhythmic accompaniment with a 'pp' dynamic marking. The second system shows measures 3 and 4. The Flute part continues its melodic line, and the Piano part continues its accompaniment. The score is marked 'Allegro' and 'pp'.

After this parallel bitonal interplay occurs in measures 1-2, a bimodal exchange in contrary motion (Flute: C, E; Piano: C, A, F) starts in measure 3 leading to parallel motion in measure 4. (Flute: F-A-F-D, E-G-E-C; Piano: A-C-A-F, G-B-G-E). This bimodality remains intact until the flute and right hand of the piano modulate to D-flat in measure 18 while the left hand continues in C major. While the left hand of the piano struggles to reach the D-flat tonality, the upper voices reach common tones on beats one and three of measures 21 and 22, after which they precede to the next common tone via different scales (measure 21: E-flat/A-flat, F/B-flat, G/C, and A/D) (see Example 11).

Example 11. *Prélude et Air*, measures 17-22.

These polytonal melodies cadence to C major in measure 23 followed by a four-measure coda. Because Denisov uses melodies in related keys, the listener does not immediately perceive the polymodal and polytonal complexity.

The *Air*, primarily song-like heterophony is written in a ternary A B A' form, with the A' a rhythmic and textural variation. The simple folk-like melody stated by the flute in asymmetric 5/4 meter allows for pulse shift shown by the list of rhythmic groupings in the piano as follows: m. 1: 2+3; m. 2: 3+2; m. 3: 2+1+2; m. 4: 3+2; mm. 5-7:

3+3+3+3+3, etc., (Example 12). This amorphous pulse compliments the melody, establishing interdependency between the flute and the piano. In measure 10 the addition of the parallel melody in the piano, at a distance of a third from the flute material, restates the theme an octave lower providing a sense of harmonic stability before the B section.

Example 12. *Prélude et Air, II. Air*, measures 1-8.

Andante

p espr.

p 2 + 3 3 + 2

2 + 1 + 2 3 + 2

3 + 3 + 3 + 3

dim.

+ 3 2 *dim.* + 2 + 2

The B section begins in the subdominant B-flat major to the opening F major. The theme begins in a retrograde diminution of the A theme, and Denisov uses the theme over a simple accompaniment, which remains in a 3+2 pulse until measure 23. The B theme in G minor, found in the piano in m. 19, is accompanied by a variation of the same theme in the flute in B-flat minor. This bitonal interplay remains until the recapitulation of the A theme in measure 27, where the accompanimental pulse changes to a duple pulse, establishing complete independence of bitonal voices until the movement's conclusion (Example 13).

Example 13. *Prélude et Air. II. Air*, measures 27-32.

The musical score for Example 13, measures 27-32, is presented in four systems. The first system shows the piano part (bottom staff) and the flute part (top staff). The piano part is marked *pp leggiero* and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The flute part is marked *p espr.* and plays a melodic line that is a retrograde diminution of the A theme. The second system continues this bitonal interplay, with the piano part maintaining its eighth-note pulse and the flute part playing its melodic line. The third system shows the piano part changing its pulse to a duple pulse, while the flute part continues its melodic line. The fourth system concludes the passage, with the piano part still in a duple pulse and the flute part playing its melodic line.

In this neo-Romantic work bimodality and bitonality create independence of voices. The traditional rhythmic organization, in contrast to multiple ratio divisions of the beat found in his mature works, conceals a lack of “collective” tonal harmony which was sanctioned by socialist “realism.” At first hearing, the innocuous style and construction of the work allow acceptance by the Soviet “realist” and dismissal by the sophisticated audience. The use of bitonality in consonant thirds, fourths, fifths, and sixths disguises the independence of the voices. These individual voices, rather than submit to the mandate of tonality and meter, are composed as an “anti-collective” musical statement rather than as a socialist tonal mandate.