
UNA NOTA SOLA: GIACINTO SCELSI AND THE GENESIS OF MUSIC ON A SINGLE NOTE

Gregory N. Reish

Roosevelt University

In the 1920s German anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and Franco-American composer Dane Rudhyar (1895–1985) each suggested that a single note might serve as ample material for musical composition. It was the Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi (1905–88), however, who realized the idea three decades later. Steiner’s and Rudhyar’s ideas exerted a strong influence on Scelsi and the formation of his monotonal style, which can be traced through his Piano Suites Nos. 8 and 9 (1952 and 1953), Triphon and Dithome for cello (1956 and 1957), and Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola) for chamber orchestra (1959).

The final chapter of Thomas Mann’s novel, *The Magic Mountain*, opens with the following, decidedly pragmatic, declaration:

Can one tell—that is to say, narrate—time, time itself, as such, for its own sake? That would surely be an absurd undertaking. A story which read: “Time passed, it ran on, the time flowed onward” and so forth—no one in his senses could consider that a narrative. It would be as though one held a single note or chord for a whole hour, and called it music.¹

The passage has a particular irony that its author could not have intended, for it was in a setting much like that of the novel—a sanatorium high in the Swiss Alps—that Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi (1905–88) reportedly discovered the musical potential of the single note. Scelsi had retreated to this idyllic environment to convalesce after suffering some sort of nervous breakdown in 1948, an event that

¹Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 541.

precipitated a four-year compositional silence. His crisis was at least partially attributable to artistic frustration, his inability to discern the one compositional idiom among the myriad styles prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s that would guide the future course of European music. By his own account, Scelsi passed time in the clinic engaged in a peculiar type of therapy: striking a single piano key repeatedly and listening intently to the sound. In an interview in 1987, just a year before his death, Scelsi described the realization that arose from this exercise:

Reiterating a note for a long time, it grows large, so large that you even hear harmony growing inside it When you enter into a sound, the sound envelops you and you become part of the sound. Gradually, you are consumed by it and you need no other sound All possible sounds are contained in it.²

When he resumed composition in 1952, Scelsi began the formation of a musical style predicated upon his new spiritual interests, chiefly theosophy, anthroposophy, Hindu metaphysics, and the meditative practices of yoga. Between 1952 and 1959 Scelsi gradually devised a compositional approach intended to focus the listening experience on increasingly concentrated sounds, believing that their resonant properties could provide a pathway to spiritual achievement. Scelsi's compositional evolution during these years culminated in the seminal *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1959) for chamber orchestra, in which isolated pitch axes serve as foci for entire movements.

The story of Scelsi's discovery during his convalescence has a certain allure as a tale of mystical revelation, a Zen-like *satori* (sudden enlightenment). Yet, there is compelling evidence that he had encountered the notion of a single note as a rich microcosm of sound among the cogitations of two early-twentieth-century figures. The first was Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), a Goethe scholar turned meta-philosopher and founder of the anthroposophical movement, who introduced the idea of sonic differentiation within a single note in a series of lectures he gave on musical

²Giacinto Scelsi, interview (1987) with Franck Mallet, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi," trans. Marco Montaguti [French to Italian] in *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, ed. Pierre Albert Castanet and Nicola Cisternino (La Spezia, Italy: Luna Editore, 1993), 25.: "Ribattendo a lungo una nota essa diventa grande, così grande che si sente sempre più armonia ed essa vi si ingrandisce all'interno, ... quando si entra in un suono ne si è avvolti, si diventa parte del suono, poco a poco si è inghiottiti da esso e non si ha bisogno di un altro suono.... [T]utti i suoni possibili sono contenuti in esso." This and all subsequent translations, unless indicated otherwise, are mine.

topics in the early 1920s.³ Steiner prophesied music on a single note as the dénouement of a long musical-spiritual evolution of the human race, outlining a history of humankind's intervallic sensitivity that began with the experience of the seventh in the ancient and spiritually advanced civilization of Atlantis.⁴ He argued that in the early post-Atlantean age man developed increasing control over his physical body and, thus, the less transcendent experience of the fifth became more pleasant. In the modern age, the pursuit of greater subjectivity in musical expression ushered in the era of the third. From this, Steiner forecast an evolutionary process of intervallic concentration, by which man would one day develop sensitivity to increasingly compressed harmonic structures.

A bold experience of the second has not yet been attained by [man] today; these are matters that lie in the future. When man's inner life intensifies, he will experience the second and finally he will be sensitive to the single tone ...[T]he single tone will be experienced as something that is musically differentiated.⁵

Steiner speculated that the single note might reveal an inner richness, what he called "the secret of the individual tone," comparable to the variety of aesthetic experience conveyed by melody.⁶

³Scelsi owned a 1973 Italian-language compendium of these lectures (Rudolf Steiner, *L'essenza della musica e l'esperienza del suono nell'uomo*, trans. Dante Vigevani [Milan: Editrice Antroposofica, 1973]. See my inventory of Scelsi's library, Appendix B in *The Transformation of Giacinto Scelsi's Musical Style and Aesthetic, 1929–1959* [Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2001]). Several of the most salient lectures had been published years earlier in Switzerland—where Scelsi lived for much of the 1930s and 1940s—and in the original German, a language that Scelsi knew. The lectures of March 7 and 8, 1923, appeared in 1928, 1954, and 1966 in Dornach under the title "Das Tonerlebnis im Menschen: Eine Grundlage für die Pflege des musikalischen Unterrichts," and that of March 16, 1923, was published in Dornach in 1928 under the title "Die Welt der Hierarchien und die Welt der Töne" (see the publication information in *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und der Tonerlebnis im Menschen*, ed. Helmut Wartburg, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, no. 283 [Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1969]). An English-language compendium also exists (Rudolf Steiner, *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, ed. Alice Wulsin, trans. Maria St. Goar [Hudson, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1983]), from which I have drawn excerpts in this article. Of particular interest is Steiner's lecture of September 29, 1920, the first in which he put forward the idea of music on a single note. The lecture's initial publication, in the 1952 edition of the *Blätter für Anthroposophie*, coincided with Scelsi's return to composition that same year and may have been a catalyst for Scelsi's radical stylistic and aesthetic departure.

⁴With an astonishing degree of certitude, Steiner professed that, "If you could go back into the Atlantean age, you would find that the music of that time, which had little similarity to today's music, was arranged according to continuing sevenths" (Steiner, "March 7, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music*, 51).

⁵Steiner, "March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music*, 71.

⁶Steiner, "March 16, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music*, 91.

The second figure of importance to Scelsi's conception was Dane Rudhyar (1895–1985), a Franco-American composer whose advocacy of musical spiritualism proved widely influential and has been cited particularly for its role in Ruth Crawford's early development.⁷ In books published in 1928 and 1930,⁸ Rudhyar discussed at length the untapped potential of the single note, giving particular emphasis to the *pleroma* of sound, a saturation of the sonic spectrum he defined as "fullness of conjoined tones within certain limits," from which a tiny portion might be carved out in the act of artistic creation.⁹ Rudhyar also set forth the concept of what he called "living tones," describing the multitudinous sounds contained within each using a series of corporeal metaphors:

A tone is a living cell. It is composed of organic matter It is a microcosmos reflecting faithfully the macrocosmos, its laws, its cycles, its centre A tone is a solar system. It is composed ... of a central sun, of planets, and of a magnetic substance which circulates rhythmically within the limits of the system and relates itself to the magnetic substance of some vaster system. Because of this, a tone is not a mere mathematical point [as in a Western score] without dimensions or density, but it is a living reality, a sound. It is defined by various sets of characteristics, pitch and [tone] quality being only the outer one [*sic*].¹⁰

⁷Judith Tick, "Ruth Crawford's 'Spiritual Concept': The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44/2 (Summer 1991), 233–39; Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44–50; and Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 207–8. For a broader discussion of Rudhyar's leading role in American musical modernism, see Chapter 6 of Carol J. Oja's *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸Dane Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1928; New York: Samuel Weiser, 1979); Dane Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power: A Series of Seven Essays on the Philosophy of Art* (Carmel, California: Hamsa, 1930).

⁹Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 64–6. Rudhyar attributes the term *pleroma* to the Gnostics, describing it as a "brotherhood of tones, resonances which are like ova of sound, and what we might call toneful space—space filled in its fullness by tones." It is likely that Rudhyar's employment of this term proceeded from Scriabin's, who referred to the so-called "mystic chord" as "the chord of the *pleroma*" during an early rehearsal of *Prometheus* (Richard Taruskin, "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], 341). Scriabin and Rudhyar would have known the term also from Madame Helena Blavatsky's theosophical treatise, *The Secret Doctrine* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888). Both Scriabin and Rudhyar regarded the *pleroma* as a monistic totality, transcending the spatial and temporal limitations of the empirical world. Scriabin tried to achieve such sonic saturation with twelve-note chords in the sketches for his *Preparatory Act*, but eventually realized that the catharsis he sought would instead require a kind of harmonic distillation down to two-note structures and ultimately the single tone. See Simon Morrison, "Skryabin and the Impossible," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (Summer 1998), 284–85 and 325.

¹⁰Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 18.

Elsewhere Rudhyar criticized the Western musical tradition for exploiting only the *external* relationships between one note and others, rather than the *internal* potential of individual tones. He argued that the single sound's importance to the Western musical mind lies solely in "the relationship between this sound and other sounds, in other words a certain sequence or group of sounds."¹¹ The Western musical *note*, designated in a score as a point in space and distinguished from a living *tone*, "has no meaning in itself. It has meaning *only in relation to other notes*."¹² Inspired partly by Asian music, Rudhyar objected to the compositional assumptions of the Western tradition, in which "the interval between the units of the musical scale [is thought of] as mere nothingness, as the abyss of 'wrong notes,'"¹³ urging composers to focus their musical attention instead on "complex tones," whose significance lay not in their external relations but in their "inner space."¹⁴

Scelsi expressed a nearly identical viewpoint in a series of interviews conducted in 1953 and 1954 that were eventually published as an informal aesthetic tract entitled, *Son et musique*.¹⁵ While he did not provide a clear exposition of the notion of music on a single note, Scelsi proposed a music based on the cosmic energy and spiritual power of what he called "correct sound." Like Rudhyar, Scelsi admonished Western musicians for ignoring the intrinsic energy of sound, focusing instead on the organizational systems that contain it. The result is emptiness—in his words, "music rather devoid of sonorous energy."¹⁶ Scelsi's assessment of structuralism in the common-practice music of the Western tradition depends heavily on Rudhyar, who decades earlier had labeled European music "an architectonic of sound ... [whose] notes have no individual power of life." Rudhyar called it "a music of holes, some larger, some smaller, yet all equally empty, like bare rooms where no one is living—soulless, as far as its substance is concerned."¹⁷ Scelsi's debt to Rudhyar, however, does not stop at his ideas, as the following key passages plainly demonstrate. First, Rudhyar's original:

¹¹Dane Rudhyar, *The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 1982), 13.

¹²Rudhyar, *The Magic of Tone*, 13, emphasis in original.

¹³Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 65.

¹⁴Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," in *Art as Release of Power: A Series of Seven Essays on the Philosophy of Art* (Carmel, California: Hamsa, 1930), 24.

¹⁵Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, ed. Luciano Martinis (Rome: Le parole gelate, 1981).

¹⁶Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 6: "la musique assez vide de cette énergie sonore."

¹⁷Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 17.

Western classical music has given practically all of its attention to the frame work of music, what it calls musical form. It has forgotten to study the laws of Sonal [*sic*] Energy, to intuit music in terms of actual sound-entities, in terms of energy which is life. It has thus evolved mostly splendid abstract frames in which no painting is to be seen.

Therefore the Oriental musicians often say that our music is a music of holes. Our notes are edges of intervals, of empty abysses. The melodies jump from edge to edge. It neither flies nor glides. It has hardly any contact with the living earth. It is a music of mummies, of preserved and stuffed animals which look alive enough perhaps, yet are dead, and motionless. *The inner space is empty.*¹⁸

Then, Scelsi's striking recapitulation:

I will say only that in general, western classical music has devoted practically all of its attention to the musical framework, which it calls the musical form. It has neglected to study the laws of sonorous energy, to think of music in terms of energy, which is life. Thus it has produced thousands of magnificent frameworks which are often rather empty, for they are only the results of a constructive imagination, which is very different from the creative imagination. The melodies themselves move from sound to sound, but the intervals are empty abysses, for the notes lack sonic energy. The inner space is empty.¹⁹

We may at least partially forgive Scelsi for this appropriation inasmuch as *Son et musique* originated as a transcribed interview; the case does not, therefore, constitute one of genuine literary plagiarism. More importantly, that Scelsi was able to recall the passage almost verbatim in conversation indicates how carefully he had read Rudhyar's book and how profoundly he was impressed by the ideas it contains.

Also important to Scelsi's emerging conception was the Hindu notion of sound as a timeless and latent metaphysical force, the cause of all motion and existence. Scelsi employs the Hindu term *anahata*, which he

¹⁸Dane Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 27, emphasis in original.

¹⁹Giacinto Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 5: "Je dirai seulement qu'en général, la musique classique occidentale a consacré pratiquement toute son attention au cadre musical, à ce qu'on appelle la forma musicale. Elle a oublié d'étudier les lois d'énergie sonore, de penser la musique en termes d'énergie, c'est-à-dire de vie, et ainsi elle a produit des milliers de cadres magnifiques mais souvent assez vides, car il n'étaient que le résultat d'une imagination constructrice, ce qui est très différent de l'imagination créatrice. Les mélodies mêmes passent de sons en sons, mais les intervalles sont des abîmes vides car les notes manquent de l'énergie sonore. L'espace intérieur est vide."

translates as “limitless sound.”²⁰ Appearing in the Sanskrit lexicon as “unstruck,” *anahata* denotes sound in its quiescent, inactivated state, perceptible only by Yoga practitioners and Hindu musicians.²¹ In Hindu metaphysics, cosmic (unstruck) sound exists atemporally, eternal and infinite, until it is activated (struck) and manifested in the physical world. Scelsi's use of the term *anahata* presupposes a fundamental dichotomy in his aesthetic between cosmic sound that is latent and infinite, and worldly sounds that are actual and finite. For Scelsi, the critical issue of temporality distinguishes the two: “Music evolves in time; sound is atemporal.”²² Elsewhere Scelsi differentiates between cosmic sound in a state of “rest” and “activated” sound, which presumably includes music. “Though cosmic in nature, [sound] can be activated and utilized, so to speak, by humans.”²³

In the Hindu tradition, cosmic sound is also referred to as *Nada-Brahman*, a mystical appellation translated variously as “causal sound,” “supreme sound,” “sacred sound,” and “the primal sound of being.”²⁴

²⁰Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 3. Scelsi's translation of the term and erroneous attribution of its origin to the *Vedas* borrow plainly from Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, who recognizes a parallel in the Sufi tradition: “Abstract Sound is called *Anahad* in the *Vedas*; its meaning is ‘limitless sound.’ The Sufis call the same sound *Surmad*, a name which suggests the idea of spiritual ecstasy.” (Clara Lombardi-Giordano and Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, *La signification du son* [Rome: L'ordre-Soufi centre de Rome, 1964], 44–5): “Le son de l'Abstrait est appelé ‘Anahad’ dans les Vedas, sa signification est: le son illimité. Le meme son les Soufis l'appellent ‘Surmad,’ nom qui donne l'idée de l'ivresse spirituelle.” An accomplished sitarist and vocalist, Khan came from a Sufi family of musicians that had served in the royal courts of central India for several generations. He traveled to America and Europe where he played Indian music and collaborated occasionally with Western musicians (see Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 147–55). Clara Lombardi-Giordano was a pianist, composer, and musicologist in Rome. In 1936 she joined The Western Sufi Order (l'Ordre-Soufi en Occident), which Khan had founded in 1910. She was also the director of the Sufi Center of Rome and the Italian branch of the International School of Sufi Meditation. Her *La signification du son*, two copies of which Scelsi owned, was published in 1964, a decade after the genesis of Scelsi's *Son et musique*. She based this book, however, on an earlier work by Khan entitled *Le mysticisme du son*, providing a compendium of highlights along with commentary. Striking similarities between Scelsi's phraseology and Khan's as expressed by Lombardi-Giordano suggest that Scelsi must have been familiar with Khan's original work.

²¹Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899; reprint, 1964), 29 and 162.

²²Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 4: “La musique évolue dans les temps, le son est intemporel.”

²³Scelsi, 2–3: “Tout en étant de nature cosmique, il peut être activé et utilisé disons par les hommes.”

²⁴Lewis Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43–7; Suresh Chandra Dey, *The Quest for Music Divine* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990), 2–8; S. Shankar Raju Naidu, “Supreme Sound: The Ultimate Reality,” *Indian Philosophical Annual* 10 (1974–75), 59; Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 81–92; Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *Nada Brahma: The World Is Sound: Music and the Landscape of Consciousness*, trans. Helmut Bredigkeit (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1987), 18.

While Scelsi does not use the phrase *Nada-Brahman* explicitly, the concept is implicit in his use of the term *anahata* and in many of his basic assumptions about the properties of cosmic sound.²⁵ The importance of sound to Hindu cosmology and cosmogony extends back to the earliest Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, in which *Nada* simply means “sound,” but generally carries with it the connotation that sound constitutes the metaphysical essence of the universe.²⁶ The compound term *Nada-Brahman* unites metaphysical sound with the *Upanishadic* designation for the Divine (the metaphysical Absolute), indicating the intrinsically sonic nature of God and of reality itself. Furthermore, since *Brahman* is “identified with the origin of the universe,”²⁷ the coupling of *Nada* with *Brahman* throughout the Hindu literature confirms that sound functions primarily as a type of creative energy, a primal causal force. Guy Beck has indicated that much of the exegetic discourse on *Nada-Brahman* “describe[s] the universe as an emanation from cosmic sound.”²⁸ Such descriptions appear in the earliest scriptures, as in the *Rig Veda*, wherein sound itself declares: “It is I who am moving the whole creation; it is I who am imparting impulse to everything that is going on; all knowledge, all actions, are being inspired by me.”²⁹ Scelsi expressed this idea rather clearly in *Son et musique*: “Yes, one might consider sound the cosmic force that is the basis of everything. There is a beautiful definition that says: ‘Sound is the first movement of the unmovable,’ and this is the beginning of creation.”³⁰ The definition was a favorite of Scelsi’s to

²⁵Though Scelsi possessed at least basic knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, it seems likely that he developed his understanding of these concepts through his study of yoga and from the influence of theosophy and other spiritualist movements.

²⁶As Jaidev Singh points out, “In its essence, [*Nada*] means the stir or impulse of the Divine Will which manifests itself to the ear at a gross level as sound” (Jaidev Singh, “*Nada* in Indian Tradition,” in *Psychology of Music: Selected Papers Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi Seminar, 1975*, ed. R. C. Mehta [Bombay: Indian Musicological Society, 1980], 37).

²⁷Dominic Goodall, ed., *Hindu Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xvii. Goodall identifies the *Brhadaranyaka*, one of the early prose *Upanishads*, as the primary source for this identification. Shankar Raju Naidu mentions also the *Aitareya Brahmana*, which “regards Sound as a womb or the Source of Creation” (Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 66).

²⁸Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 7.

²⁹The *Vagambhriniya Sūkta* of the *Rig Veda* 10: 125; quoted in Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 67. Similarly, in the *Atharva Veda* sound asserts: “It is I who created all the spheres of creation and all the bodies of living beings and it is I who am permeating the bodies of their vital force and the whole world like the air everywhere in a special and complete manner. And it is I who living beyond the sun etc. and also beyond this earth, i.e., existing from before the creation of these, ... am now manifesting myself in a complete manner after giving shape to creation on such a large scale” (*Atharva Veda* 4: 30; quoted in Naidu, “Supreme Sound,” 67).

³⁰Scelsi, *Sound and Music*, 2: “Oui, on peut considérer le son comme la force cosmique qui est la base de tout. Il y a une belle définition qui dit: ‘Le Son est le premier mouvement de l’Immobile,’ et ceci est le début de la Création.”

which he returned in other instances;³¹ its specific source remains unidentified. The wording, which may in fact be Scelsi's own, recalls the famous "unmoved mover" of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but its explicit connection of sound with creation reflects more compellingly the Hindu tradition.

During the 1950s, Scelsi gradually came to understand the single "note" as an infinitesimal particle of an infinite sonic force, and therefore as a limitless world of sound. He began to conceive the timbral, dynamic, microtonal explorations of single notes in his works as "activations": temporal, bounded projections of an atemporal, unbounded sonic reality.³² Beginning with his return to composition in 1952, Scelsi spent the remainder of the decade forging a compositional style that conveys the infinite richness, the *inner space* of isolated sounds carved out of the pleroma. Rejecting the aesthetic premise that sounds must progress to other sounds in order to have any significance, he essentially renounced such conventional techniques as thematic development, melodic variation, contrapuntal elaboration, harmonic progression, and cadential resolution. His efforts began with a series of piano works that feature the reiteration of particular notes or sonorities. As it became clear that the piano's tempered tuning and inability to sustain would not permit the extremely refined sonic manipulations required of his new aesthetic, Scelsi turned his attention to solo works and duets for wind and string instruments. Liberated from the constraints of equal temperament, he gradually incorporated microtones into his evolving compositional language, first with vibrato and glissando, then with increasingly pervasive use of quartertones.

By the time of *Dithome* and *Triphon*—two critical works for solo cello of 1956 and 1957—microtonalism had become an essential feature of Scelsi's style, integrally bound up with timbral metamorphosis and dynamic shaping. What remained was for Scelsi to transfer these techniques to ensemble settings, where his timbral and dynamic ranges broadened considerably and where the resonance of the harmonic dimension could contribute to the animated presentation of isolated sounds. Having developed a compositional style in which every musical parameter was subject to

³¹See Giacinto Scelsi, "La forza cosmica del suono," *i suoni, le onde: Rivista della Fondazione Isabella Scelsi* 4 (1993), 31.

³²Of course the notion of sound (and, potentially, music) existing eternally, lying dormant in the universe until activated, had appeared also in the aesthetic traditions of Western music. In a discussion of Romantic aesthetics, particularly those of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Rey Longyear observes that "the concept of music slumbering in the universe itself is a sort of Romantic reawakening of archaic ideas about the harmony of the spheres" (Rey M. Longyear, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music* [Englewood Cliffs, N J: Prentice-Hall, 1973], 111). Busoni had written of music as "part of the vibrating universe" and advocated composition through activation of this etheric music: "For, behold, the myriad strains that once shall sound have existed since the beginning, ready, afloat in the aether, and together with them other myriads that shall never be heard And myriad strains are there since the beginning, still waiting for manifestation." (Busoni, "Sketch of a New Esthetic," 82 and 100.)

manipulation even at the most refined level, in 1959 Scelsi was at last able to reveal the inexhaustibility of an extremely concentrated sound with the *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* for chamber orchestra.

OSCILLATION AND CHANGING HARMONIES: SCELSI'S EIGHTH AND NINTH PIANO SUITES

Scelsi's first significant steps toward the realization of music on a single note came in the Eighth and Ninth Piano Suites (1952 and 1953), wherein he explored two fundamental types of musical focus: harmonic complexity above stable fundamentals and oscillatory motion around localized pitch axes. The former type appears in the remarkable fourth movement of the Piano Suite No. 8 (*Bot-ba*)³³ (the first work he completed after resuming composition in 1952), in which Scelsi explicitly calls for the simulation of a gong. The movement begins with percussive, *fortissimo* attacks of a low B fundamental, shown in Example 1. Then, just as the sound of an actual gong swells and thickens with repeated strikes, the overtones accumulating and compounding, Scelsi increases the density

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Scelsi's Piano Suite No. 8, Movement IV. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked 'Lento (♩ = 54)' and includes dynamic markings 'ff', 'percussivo, come gong (stacc. e lasciar vibrare col ped.)', 'fff', and 'sffz'. The second system includes 'f', 'ff', and 'sffz'. The notation shows a low B fundamental with complex harmonic structures and overtones.

Example 1. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 8 (*Bot-ba*), Movement IV, Opening.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

³³The work's title, *Bot-ba*, probably derives from the Tibetan name for the country itself, *Bod*, while its explanatory subtitle suggests a type of spiritual travelogue, snapshots of Scelsi's journeys to the East: "An evocation of Tibet with its monasteries on high mountains. Tibetan rituals. Prayers and Dances." Scelsi claimed to have traveled extensively in Asia and Africa as a young man. To date, no documentary evidence of these travels has come to light.

and volume of his sonority with successive attacks. At the same time, he inhibits the discernment of traditional harmonic relationships among the pitches through the use of dissonant intervals (seconds and sevenths), the low register, and the sustain pedal. The listener is compelled to perceive the pitches not in relation to the fundamental, but as components of it. The notes, in a sense, lose their discrete identities and become parts of a single expanding sound-mass.

Scelsi's efforts to evoke the sound of a gong using reiterated piano sonorities with depressed pedal go beyond the picturesque sound painting of an exotic programmaticism; they provide further evidence of Rudhyar's influence and point the way toward Scelsi's single-note music. In *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, Rudhyar had given passionate emphasis to gongs, which

represent an aspect of the highest and most spiritual music, that of *single tones* which are one and many, which throb and live, which are at times the perfect dynamic bodies of celestial entities Single living tones! ... In a single tone you have a complete organic symphony. Such a tone is the beginning and end of all music, the seed of all music.³⁴

Two years later, in 1930, Rudhyar declared that Western musical culture was beginning to develop "a new sense of music based on the feeling of tone-fullness."³⁵ In this new music the piano was to play a primary role as a Western analogue to the Asian gong: a monolithic resonant palette from which an inexhaustible range of sonorous colors might emerge.

This new sense of tone-fullness, of synthetic resonance, is manifest for instance in a new type of piano playing based on the realization that the piano is a sort of big gong, that the important factor in the instrument is not the keyboard, not even the separate strings, but the homogeneous sounding-board or table of resonance which, especially with the help of the pedal, gives birth to tone-masses, to complex, synthetic entities of sound.³⁶

Rudhyar rightly points out that the piano can only achieve this gong-like effect if played in a manner antithetical to its tempered, keyboard design, and he later praises Henry Cowell's experiments with tone clusters as an important step in the right direction. What distinguishes Scelsi's approach in Piano Suite No. 8 is that his sound-masses are anchored by a strong

³⁴Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 23–4, emphasis in original.

³⁵Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 29.

³⁶Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 29.

fundamental tone (B in Movement IV, G \flat in Movement V), whereas Cowell's well-known secundal clusters obliterate any sense of pitch definition.

Despite the occasional examples of sonorism in Suite No. 8, the majority of the work retains unmistakable stylistic ties to Scelsi's modernist piano music of the 1930s. Its aggressive dissonances and frequently diffuse pitch content provide little sense of where his style was headed. Suite No. 9 (*Tai*) of 1953, however, constitutes a far-reaching and radical departure that patently indicates Scelsi's new direction.³⁷ The rhythmic dynamism that traces back to his piano music of the 1930s is gone, replaced by a mood of meditative restraint and tranquility. In a striking deviation from the strident dissonance of his earlier piano music, Scelsi makes extensive use of traditionally consonant structures, including tertian harmonies, pentatonicism, and diatonic modality. Remarkably, his search for the resonant core of sound led him to discard the wildly free chromaticism of the previous piano suites and sonatas. Realizing that frenetic dissonance would not conduce the type of focused musical experience he now pursued, Scelsi retreated to more conventional sonorities presented in unfamiliar ways. He rejected the Schoenbergian "emancipation of the dissonance"³⁸ and began to explore the sonorous qualities of structures whose consonance had been linked to natural, acoustic phenomena at least as far back as Rameau, if not Guido, Boethius, and Pythagoras.

Scelsi described the suite in his prefatory comment as "a succession of episodes alternately expressing Time (or more precisely Time in Motion) and Man, as symbolized by cathedrals or monasteries, with the sacred sound—*Om*." Indeed, a discernible contrast of style distinguishes the odd-numbered movements from the even-numbered ones, reflecting this programmatic alternation. The odd-numbered movements—representing "time in motion" (and man's perception of it)—feature persistent oscillation around various pitch axes executed with a dispassionate regularity of rhythm and articulation. The even-numbered movements, representing man with "the sacred sound—*Om*," are more dynamic in conception, resembling the gong-like expansions and contractions of the Eighth Suite. Within this simple alternation of material, Scelsi began to perfect two of

³⁷As with Suite No. 8, the title of Suite No. 9 (*Tai*) has proven difficult to trace. It is rendered on the cover of Werner Bärtschi's recording of the piece (Accord 200802) as *Paix* (Peace).

³⁸Schoenberg explained the concept as follows: "The term *emancipation of the dissonance* refers to its comprehensibility, which is considered equivalent to the consonance's comprehensibility. A style based on this premise treats dissonances like consonances and renounces a tonal centre" (Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (1)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 217).

the most distinctive compositional techniques of his sonorist style: The projection of tonal axes through oscillatory activity and changing harmonic relief, and expanding and contracting sound-worlds based on sustained fundamentals. A closer look at the first two of the suite's nine movements demonstrates these approaches.

The first movement begins gently with tranquil undulations around its B_b axis, although the nature of the rotation around B_b in each of the two staves differs significantly (see Example 2). The right hand hovers in a narrow orbit around B_b , moving predominantly by semitone and never drifting farther than a whole step from the tonal axis. The effect is rather like an exceptionally wide, decelerated vibrato—something that Scelsi exploited thoroughly in later years. With the pedal depressed, these semitonal undulations effectively saturate the spectrum of pitch between A_b and B . Scelsi strives to project not four discreet pitches (A_b , A , B_b , B), but the *entire space* between A_b and B as a *single sonic entity* with B_b at its core. In this way, perception of the central B_b becomes fluid and supple, subject to inflection and variation; from here the adoption of microtonalism lies only a small step away. The left hand, meanwhile, pivots around B_b in disjunct motion, primarily by thirds and fifths, resulting in what look like conventional arpeggiations suggesting, at times, B_b minor. Elsewhere in the movement, the harmonic context around B_b implies other triadic frameworks, including A_b minor (with B_b as an added second) and E_b minor (with B_b as its fifth). Thus, the first movement includes two distinct manners of projecting its tonal axis:

CALMO, senza espressione ($\text{♩} = 69$)

pp *poco* *sempre molto p*

sempre con due pedali

impercettibilmente movendo - - -

pp

Example 2. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 9 (*Ttai*), Movement I, Opening.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

One establishes a narrow bandwidth within which the music vacillates around the central note, while the other places the central note into relief against a changing harmonic backdrop. And just as the right hand's narrow orbit points toward the eventual adoption of microtonalism, the disjunct rotation of the left hand anticipates the harmonically enriched drones of Scelsi's monotonal music.

The solemn F_{\sharp} octaves that initiate the suite's second movement (see Example 3) typify the even-numbered movements' evocations of the Hindu *Om*, "the Divine seed sound from which all other sounds are said to arise."³⁹ Unlike the odd-numbered movements, whose regularity gives the impression of time passing, the opening of this movement seems perfectly still. The protracted note values occur at a tempo so slow and deliberate that the progress of time is rendered almost imperceptible. Such a passage denies nearly every aesthetic premise of Western musical convention. It is utterly devoid of melody and harmony, and lacks any purposeful sense of musical rhythm. The listener is gently immersed in a single, static sound. There occurs no development or impetus of any kind, not even the expansions and contractions that characterize the Eighth Suite's gong evocations. Only the arrangement of octaves and the dynamics undergo slight modifications, which manifest essentially as variations of timbre.

At this stage in the development of his sonorist style, however, Scelsi was not ready to sustain an entire movement using a single note, and the music shifts to a rhythmically irregular projection of three pitch classes: A_b , B_b , and E_b , a [0,2,7] subset of the pentatonic scale (see Example 4).

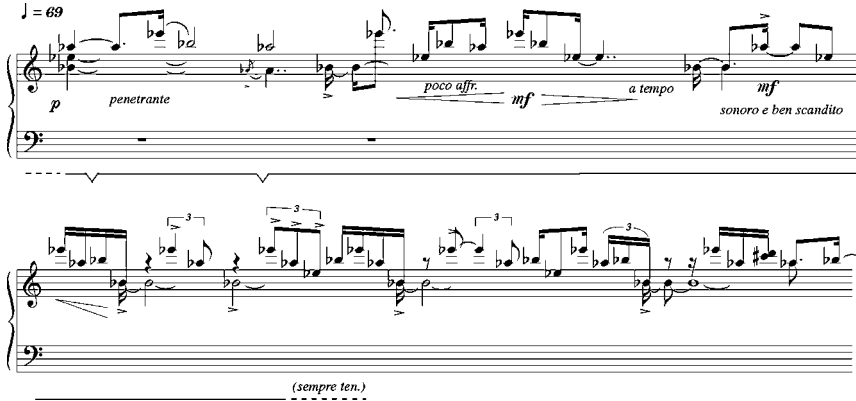
* *Lentissimo* ($\text{♩} = 42$)

*NB: Appoggiare le dita sui tasti, premere profondamente, e poi lasciar vibrare

Example 3. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 9 (*Ttai*), Movement II, Opening.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

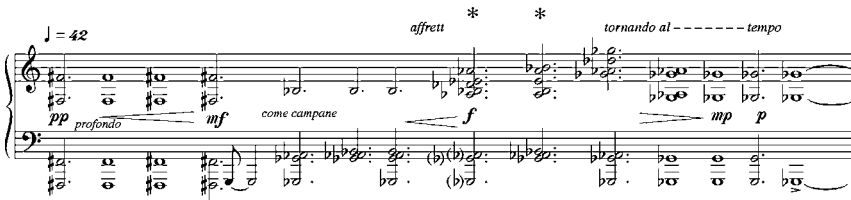
³⁹Harold Coward and David Goa, *Mantra: Hearing the Divine in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1991), 3.



Example 4. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 9 (Ttai), Movement II, p. 7.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

Indeed, this section of the movement invokes a Debussian type of Oriental exoticism; its limited pitch content is even announced at the beginning of the section with an impressionistically quartal structure. Scelsi's desire to focus the musical experience takes him, in this section, from the unrestrained chromaticism and harsh dissonance of his earlier piano music to the expurgated consonance of a three-note collection comprised chiefly of perfect intervals.⁴⁰ The monotonal representation of *Om* on F# returns mid-way through the movement (see Example 5), where it undergoes the kind of



Example 5. Scelsi, Piano Suite No. 9 (Ttai), Movement II, p. 8.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

⁴⁰The interval vector of the [0,2,7] pitch-class set is <010020>. It contains one perfect fifth (invertible to a perfect fourth), one perfect fourth, and one major second.

sonorous dilation that Scelsi had used in Suite No. 8: The initial octaves expand into denser sonorities, then contract back into their simplest form.

The composer specifies that the effect should simulate the sound of a bell (“come campane”), which Rudhyar and Scelsi had both identified as a Western corollary to the gong.⁴¹ The components of this expanding sound-mass have particular significance, for they are the notes of the previous [0,2,7] set (A_b, B_b, and E_b), now supplemented with D_b. The consonant trichord from the preceding section, with its impressionistically exotic flavor derived from the pentatonic scale, is thus absorbed into the seed sound. Rather conspicuously, this circumstance induces an enharmonic shift of the fundamental note from F_♯ to G_b.⁴² Combining G_b with the other four notes, Scelsi generates a complete G_b major pentatonic scale (the anhemitonic scale, played entirely on the black keys of the piano; see Example 6).

In the passage, Scelsi presents the elements of this scale in various harmonic combinations. Despite the presence of seconds in all of these

Example 6. Formation of G_b major (anhemitonic) Pentatonic.

⁴¹Rudhyar, “The New Sense of Space,” 27; Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 5. Scelsi appropriated this notion from Rudhyar. See chapter 3 of my dissertation, *The Transformation of Giacinto Scelsi’s Musical Style and Aesthetic, 1929–1959*.

⁴²Scelsi’s reason for respelling F_♯ as G_b must have been something other than notational convenience and syntactical accuracy, for he could have started the passage with G_bs and avoided a sudden shift midway. Perhaps he intended to indicate the precise moment when the pentatonic material dissolves into the seed sound with a conspicuous visual cue. Or perhaps he wanted to suggest that because of the music’s expansion and contraction—revealing some of the inner life of the seed sound—the octaves at the end of the passage are necessarily heard in a new way. Alternatively, the switch from F_♯ to G_b could imply that the two are not precisely the same sound, and that the passage does not begin and end in the same sonic location. On a piano tuned to equal temperament, these two notes are certainly equivalent, but with Scelsi’s developing sensitivity to tone he may have thought otherwise. While there exists no evidence that Scelsi ever explored the resonant possibilities of alternative tuning systems, the “modulation” in this passage nevertheless seems to underscore the radical nature of Scelsi’s conception.

constructs, the collective effect is relatively consonant (all of the seconds in the scale are major). Furthermore, the G \flat major pentatonic scale contains two conventionally triadic possibilities: a G \flat major triad and an E \flat minor triad, the latter having been used in the first movement to put the B \flat axis in relief. While neither of these chords appears here as a simple triad, they both occur embedded in the chords located at the center of the passage (marked with asterisks in Example 5).

While the Ninth Suite represents the most thoroughgoing and effective of Scelsi's early efforts to project the inner space of isolated sounds, his refinement of the techniques it contains was hindered by the timbral and tempered confines of the solo piano medium. Despite the work's conceptual advancements, many of its sonorist features rely on simulation rather than realization for their effect. In particular, his use of the pedal in conjunction with semitonal vacillations and increasingly dense pitch aggregates implies a greater subtlety of timbre and pitch than the piano can actually produce. By the time of the Ninth Suite, if not earlier, Scelsi had probably begun to realize that his aesthetic path would necessitate his abandonment of the piano.⁴³ The need to break free of the restrictions imposed by the keyboard had, in fact, already been expressed by earlier theorists of single-note music. Steiner referred to the piano as "the Philistine instrument" because of what he perceived as its poor reflection of the spiritual world. The piano is an abstraction, a product entirely of the physical world whose "tones are abstractly lined up next to each other ... [and thus] is the one instrument that actually, in a musical sense, *must be overcome*."⁴⁴ And even Rudhyar, who had proclaimed the piano "a sort of big gong," mitigated his enthusiasm with the recognition that it must be played unidiomatically to achieve this effect.⁴⁵ Scelsi's belief, adopted from Rudhyar and Hindu metaphysics, that the creation of a new kind of music would involve carving out portions of a limitless sonic realm essentially dictated his abnegation of equal temperament, and with it, the piano. Dividing the infinitely plentiful sonic continuum into any number of stepped degrees sharply conflicted with this radical view of composition. Even with the accumulating overtones Scelsi managed to generate in his

⁴³Although he went on to write three more large-scale works for the piano, the Ninth Suite remained the most progressive and radically sonorist of Scelsi's piano works of the 1950s. His Suite No. 10 (*Ka*) (1954), *Action Music* (1955), and Suite No. 11 (1956) all retreat in some degree to the less satisfying combination of dissonant reiteration and rhythmic aggressiveness that had characterized Suite No. 8.

⁴⁴Steiner, "March 8, 1923, Stuttgart [Lecture]," *The Inner Nature of Music*, 75, emphasis added. Though not explicitly stated here, one senses that Steiner's objection to the piano, to its abstract construction, lay at least partly in the instrument's inherent subjection to equal temperament, its inability to produce microtones, and its inefficacy in conveying subtleties of timbre.

⁴⁵Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space," 29.

sonorist piano music, the chromatic scale offered only a skeleton of the pleroma. With the piano he simply could not get at the space between the notes, no matter how cleverly he implied it. He needed media that could move seamlessly about the sonic spectrum, and whose sustain would allow pitch focus and dynamic intensification without requiring reiteration.

TOWARD MICROTONALISM: WORKS FOR SOLO WINDS

Thus, in 1956 Scelsi stopped composing for piano—his own instrument—turning his attention to solo works and duets for winds and strings.⁴⁶ He had already branched out beyond the piano in late 1953 and 1954 with several pieces for flute and clarinet (solos and duets) and the *Divertimento No. 2* for violin. In these works Scelsi endeavored to focus the experience of pitch in a linear, predominantly monophonic setting, without amassing notes into expansive sonic clouds as he was then doing at the piano. Instead, he explored the stationary consonance of familiar linear structures, such as tertian arpeggios, tonal scales, and the church modes. These structures are not used conventionally, however, to imply tonal or modal harmony, as Scelsi had little interest in the teleology of harmonic progression. In an effort to suggest a kind of stasis, Scelsi often concentrated on the linear outline of a single consonant sonority—generally, the tonic triad of a conventional scale with other notes of the scale included as coloristic additions. *Pwyll* (1954) for solo flute derives almost entirely from the F melodic minor scale, with only a few chromatic inflections (see Example 7).

Elsewhere in these early sonorist works, Scelsi projects rotational pitch axes by using linear oscillations within a narrow band around a central note, as he had done in the odd-numbered movements of *Piano Suite No. 9*. Along with the rapid reiteration of the pitch axis, wind and string instruments now afforded the possibilities of sustain, controlled dynamic shaping, and greater variety of articulation. Scelsi began to exploit these capacities as means to project and enliven the axial pitch. At times, the oscillation occurs not around a single pitch but around a semitonal dyad. In such cases, the axis may lie somewhere between the two notes, or, even more provocatively, it may comprise *the entire space* circumscribed by the semitonal boundaries. In Example 8 from Movement III of the *Suite for flute and clarinet* (1953), the pitch axis seems to exist in the space

⁴⁶Because the bulk of his solo works for orchestral instruments date from the very years he was forging his new style, it seems clear that he preferred simplified contexts for the development of his ideas. He also may have drawn inspiration from various types of Oriental music, in which solo string and wind instruments predominate.

Example 7. Scelsi, *Pwyll* for flute, mm. 113–123.

© 1975 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP). International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

Example 8. Scelsi, *Suite for Flute and B_b Clarinet, Movement III*, mm. 58–70.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

between E and D \sharp . The two instruments alternately sustain these pitches, which are animated by narrow pitch oscillation, trills, and dynamic changes. Because the sounds of the flute and clarinet generally do not overlap one another, their alternation gives the impression of a continuous sound with fluctuating pitch and timbre, rather than genuine contrapuntal interplay.

As in the contemporaneous piano music, Scelsi seems perched upon the precipice of microtonalism with such subtle and concentrated musical expressions. From a sustained musical gesture so condensed that it occurs predominantly within the space of a half-step, the explicit use of smaller

intervals seems almost inevitable. Scelsi had already begun to use glissandi and vibrato to gain access to the space between the notes of equal temperament, and these remained essential features of his sonorist style for the rest of his career. But by themselves these techniques were too imprecise. They did not provide sufficient control over the complete sonic spectrum, the limitless realm from which he now sought to carve out portions in a sonorist kind of *soggetto cavato*. Scelsi adopted microtonalism because the evolution of his style led him to it—and because his aesthetic demanded it.⁴⁷

Scelsi's decisive step into categorical microtonalism came in the second and third movements of the *Tre studi* for E \flat clarinet of 1954. Thus his first use of microtones occurred considerably earlier than has been suggested—

⁴⁷Although the impetus for adopting microtonalism came primarily from Scelsi's own stylistic path and sonorist aesthetic, he certainly would have been familiar with the notion from his influences and background. Theories of microtonalism were widespread in the first half of the twentieth century, and numerous composers had experimented with microintervals as far back as the late nineteenth century. Charles Ives (1874–1954) is today among the most celebrated early exponents of microtonalism, but his work was scarcely known at the time. In Europe, Czech composer Alois Hába (1893–1973)—a theosophist—began microtonal experimentation in 1914. Quartertone pianos were built in Vienna by von Möllendorf in 1917, and in Paris by Russian emigrant Ivan Vishnegradsky in 1922 (see Paul Griffiths, Mark Lindley, and Ioannis Zannos, "Microtone," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy [Accessed 25 March 2005], <http://www.grovemusic.com>). In "Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music," Busoni proposed a system of third-tones, recognizing the unsuitability of equal temperament for the music of the future. Scelsi owned a copy of the Dover English edition of Busoni's "Sketch of a New Esthetic" (in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, trans. Th. Baker [New York: Dover, 1962]), but certainly may have encountered it decades earlier in German or Italian. Microtones had also been proclaimed an essential feature of the new, more spiritual music expounded by the theosophists. In a book that Scelsi owned, theosophist and composer Cyril Scott (1879–1970) had written of the notes "between the notes," which he argued were implicit in Scriabin's *Prometheus* (Cyril Scott, *Music: Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages*, 6th ed. [London: Rider and Company, 1951], 82). Even the theosophist Annie Besant (1847–1933), a non-musician, celebrated the arrival of a new compositional style involving microtones: "[Music] is beginning to show signs of the coming art—subtler harmonies, minuter distances between notes, tendencies to quarter-notes as well as half-notes, quarter-tones; and already there are one or two musicians who are beginning in their melodies to play with these subtler kinds of tones, making strange new music—music which the public ear is not yet accustomed to, which it challenges when it hears it, but which is the Music of the Future, when a vaster range of sound shall appeal to the ears more finely organised than ours, and when the ears of a new race shall demand from its musicians greater delicacies of musical sound than have yet been mastered amongst us" (Annie Besant, *The Changing World: Lectures to Theosophical Students* [London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910], 72). Besant's somewhat ambiguous use of "quarter-note" and "half-note" seems to refer to intervals rather than rhythmic values. Had she intended the latter, she probably would have employed the British terminology "crotchet" and "minim," respectively.

a full two years before he abandoned the piano.⁴⁸ The first movement of the *Tre studi* evinces the same techniques of pitch focus and oscillation that characterize Scelsi's other woodwind works of the period, those without microtonal inflection. The use of quartertones in the second movement of the *Tre studi* is fairly extensive; the difference in overall sound between the first and second movements is striking.⁴⁹ Yet, microtonalism does not play a crucial role in the second movement's basic structure. However prominently they infuse the surface sound, quartertones do not serve as vital elements of the movement's underlying pitch organization. They function only as ornaments, stepping stones between conventionally tuned pitches. They are rarely sustained for longer than a quarter note, and they almost always move to one of the adjacent tempered scale degrees (usually upward) in much the same way that dissonances resolve by step in conventional counterpoint. The purpose of the quartertones is to fill in the gaps between the essential pitches, so that the music no longer "jumps from note to note," as Rudhyar put it.⁵⁰

POINTING THE WAY: TRIPHON AND DITHOME FOR SOLO CELLO

Interestingly, Scelsi retreated from microtonalism in the solo works of 1955 (*Divertimenti* Nos. 2 and 3 for violin; *Coelocanth* for viola; *Hyxos* for flute, gong, and bell). Perhaps he did not yet feel entirely comfortable with the technique or was not entirely convinced of its usefulness. In 1956, he resumed using quartertones in his solo works, where they took on considerably more structural significance. In these works, the focus on isolated pitches sharpens considerably. Single pitch axes are maintained for longer stretches, and the nature of the activity around them becomes less and less diffuse. Conventional arpeggiations, scales, and modality are replaced by increasingly subtle and refined sonic variations of more concentrated pitch material. Such is the case with the last of the *Quattro pezzi* for trumpet of 1956, a significant milestone in the evolution of Scelsi's sonorist style. The entire last movement—

⁴⁸Several writers have asserted that Scelsi began to use microtones at exactly the same time that he gave up composing for the piano, in 1956 or 1957 (see, for instance, Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Elegia per Ty; Divertimento n. 3*, [et al], trans. Elisabeth Buzzard, Accord CD 200622 [1989], 7). While these two crucial developments in his career certainly correlate, they did not precisely coincide. The period between 1954 and 1957 was one of gradual realization for Scelsi; he was equally slow in his adoption of microtones and his abandonment of the piano.

⁴⁹His decision to introduce quartertones in the second movement, rather than the first, may have been an effort to demonstrate the correctness of this critical step. As Schoenberg had done with his move into atonality in the last movement of his String Quartet No. 2, Scelsi may have wanted to show that his employment of microintervals was dictated—logically and inevitably—by his stylistic direction.

⁵⁰Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27.

which occupies just one page in the score—centers on F, never venturing farther away than E_b. In this context, microtonal inflections assume tremendous significance, even though their use is less plentiful than in the *Tre studi* for clarinet. As the listener is drawn into the concentrated world of a single note, the slightest variations of dynamics, articulation, and pitch convey an abundance of musical information. Quartertones no longer serve as mere ornaments, providing smooth passage between primary notes. They have become substantive elements of the concentrated sound world, often sustained and without necessarily resolving to an adjacent pitch.

Thus, it would seem that Scelsi arrived at a conception of sonorist monotonalism as early as 1956, three years before the celebrated *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra. Yet, Scelsi's accomplishment in the *Quattro pezzi* for trumpet did not provide the breakthrough he needed. Adherence to a single note occurs in just one particularly brief movement. And while microtonalism plays an important role in that movement, helping to convey the pliability of the central note, its use remains sparse. Most significantly, the medium of the work is both monophonic and timbrally limited. Although Scelsi managed to generate some timbral variety with the meticulous control of articulation, dynamics, and muting, a solo trumpet simply could not provide enough harmonic and coloristic variety for Scelsi to cultivate the subtle variation techniques that would later become hallmarks of his mature style.

More consequential achievements during this crucial period in Scelsi's career were the cello works *Triphon* (1956) and *Dithome* (1957).⁵¹ The particular importance of these works in the evolution of Scelsi's sonorist style lies in the greatly refined means by which he energizes and animates the sound of a single note. Perhaps the most significant of these techniques is the carefully controlled employment of microtones, which infuse the two works. Both *Triphon* and *Dithome* include more extensive and essential use of microtones than do any of Scelsi's other solo works of the period, pointing the way toward the full realization of music on a single note.⁵² Example 9 from the first of *Triphon*'s three movements

⁵¹These eventually became the first two parts of the *Trilogia* for solo cello, which Scelsi completed in 1965 when he added the third piece, *Ygghur*. Together the works of the *Trilogia* came to represent "the three stages of man," each with its own programmatic subdivision: Youth–Energy–Drama; Maturity–Energy–Thought; Old Age–Memories–Catharsis–Liberation. It remains unclear whether Scelsi originally conceived *Triphon* and *Dithome* as parts of a trilogy, and whether their programmatic associations were present in their initial formulations. Frances-Marie Uitti—the works' dedicatee and primary interpreter—recalls that once all three parts of the *Trilogia* were complete, Scelsi "considered them an autobiography in sound representing his own passage through life" (Frances-Marie Uitti, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Trilogia and Ko-Tha*, Frances-Marie Uitti (violoncello), Etcetera CD 1136 [1992], 1).

⁵²His increased attention to microtonalism surfaces even in the preface to the published score of *Trilogia*, which presents a more elegant manner of notating quartertones, replacing the cumbersome approach of Scelsi's earlier microtonal works.



Example 9. Scelsi, *Triphon*, Movement I, p. 9.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

illustrates the fundamental importance of microtones to the work's conception. They are not ornamental but essential; they lie at the epicenter of the oscillatory activity, forming a sonic core and precisely filling the space delimited by the rapid semitonal vacillations on the staff underneath.⁵³

Despite the profusion of notes in the score, their combination results in a single animated sound that effectively saturates a narrow portion of the sonic spectrum. In these works Scelsi also distinguishes three degrees of vibrato, calling them *oscillations*. His use of this term underscores that these “special effects” evolved from the vacillating semitones of his earlier sonoric works. These vibrati act as sonic catalysts, activating an otherwise static note such that it becomes the axis of a narrow orbit. What distinguishes these oscillations from those in earlier works is that they are continuous rather than stepped, gliding rather than jumping from note to note.

In *Triphon* and *Dithome* Scelsi added to the techniques at his disposal for the animation of individual sounds by exploiting the multiple-stop potential of the cello. In solo works for wind or brass instruments, the strict linearity of the medium prevented him from exploring the harmonic dimension, although he tried at times to imply it (for example, the F minor arpeggios of *Pwyll*). With a solo cello, however, Scelsi was able to activate and enrich the sound of a particular note by placing it into explicit harmonic relief. Because timbre is chiefly a product of the harmonic series—the particular vertical configuration of a fundamental and its upper partials—Scelsi's use of harmonic intervals on different strings of the cello proceeded naturally from the subtle timbral variations he had already effected in earlier works, for such variations amount to harmonic manipulations of a very subtle type. In *Triphon* and *Dithome*, he simply expanded these manipulations to the harmony of pitches actually

⁵³Beginning with *Triphon* and *Dithome*, Scelsi's notation of string music expanded to multiple staves. In the 1960s and 1970s, he often used four staves to notate string music, one staff for each string.

produced on different strings. While the four strings of the cello still restricted Scelsi's full exploration of harmonic resonance, the techniques introduced in these works anticipate the more complex vertical activations he used in ensemble music of subsequent years.

Scelsi's concern with the subtleties of pitch inflection and harmonic resonance relates closely to his growing interest in timbral metamorphosis, which guides much of the activity in *Triphon* and *Dithome*. In addition to the conventional assortment of articulations and bowing techniques—which he exploits meticulously—Scelsi extends the timbral range of the cello through the use of steel-guitar plectrums and specially designed mutes, particularly in *Triphon*. These unusual performance accessories enrich the instrument's timbre by affecting the overtone makeup of the sound. The preface to the score includes the following explanation:

The mutes required by Scelsi for the strings in certain works do not function as ordinary mutes; their forms are different and also the material with which they are made. They are metallic objects that rub against the string and produce a grating, buzzing sound; *harmonics are added, not taken away*.⁵⁴

In addition to modifying timbre, the mutes also have the unexpected effect of altering the pitch of particular sounds. Frances-Marie Uitti has remarked that in *Triphon* “the cello is divided by the use of a metallic mute that vibrates on top of the G and C strings creating a ‘rumble’ in energy and *altered microtonal intonation*.”⁵⁵ Because mutes are generally acknowledged to have an effect on timbre and dynamics,⁵⁶ her comment implies that change in one musical parameter (timbre or dynamics) can give rise to change in another (pitch).

The significance of this implication extends far beyond the use of metallic mutes; by the time of *Triphon* in 1956, a principle of interdependence among the musical parameters had become fundamental to Scelsi's evolving sonorist style. He had already approximated the effect in his sonorist piano music, wherein the accumulating overtones of increasingly dense sonorities produce a transformation of timbre. With the microtonalism

⁵⁴Preface to Giacinto Scelsi, *Trilogia* (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1985), emphasis added. It seems likely that the author of this comment was Uitti, who knew these works intimately and helped Scelsi prepare them for publication. It appears also in the general introduction to Scelsi's catalog with Salabert, where it is meant to apply to *Trilogia* as well as other string works. Thus, it may have been written by Sharon Kanach, who compiled the catalog.

⁵⁵Uitti, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Trilogia; Ko-Tha*, 2, emphasis added.

⁵⁶“A mechanical device used on musical instruments to muffle the tone, i.e. to alter the timbre; the volume is usually somewhat decreased in the process” (David Boyden, “Mute,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy [Accessed 25 March 2005], <http://www.grovemusic.com>).

of *Triphon* and *Dithome*, Scelsi moved ever closer to the projection of an extremely concentrated sound, within which the slightest changes in any one parameter reverberate in others and, therefore, have a profound impact on the intensely focused listening experience. The concept is neither scientific speculation nor metaphysical fancy; studies in psychoacoustics have confirmed that variation in one acoustic parameter can affect the perception of another.⁵⁷ Scelsi, however, had come to this realization through the practices of *Nada-Yoga* (the yoga of sound), in which the practitioner refines his auditory capacity by concentrating intently on the subtlest of sounds.⁵⁸ The science of psychoacoustics verifies what Scelsi understood from his study of yoga: At a supremely refined level of listening, musical parameters that we normally consider autonomous and finite reveal themselves to be interdependent and infinitely variable. Subtle changes in pitch, like those produced by the vibrati and microtonal inflections of *Triphon* and *Dithome*, bring about changes in timbre.

⁵⁷Gerald Murch has pointed out that the perception of pitch “varies not only with frequency but also with intensity. If a tuning fork is sounded and moved closer to the ear, a change in pitch occurs” (Gerald M. Murch, *Visual and Auditory Perception* [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1973], 154–63). Similarly, Leonard Meyer submits that the perception of each sonic parameter actually depends upon a network of interrelationships: “Pitch, for instance, is a complex function of both frequency and intensity. One can keep frequency constant and, by changing intensity, alter pitch. Similarly, loudness and volume, which probably combine to form what we designate as the dynamic level (though this is obviously also a function of context), are complex tonal attributes which cannot be equated in any simple way with any single physical characteristic of sound. And so it is also with the other qualitative attributes of sound” (Leonard Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994], 246).

⁵⁸Scelsi had already broached the idea in the 1940s in one of the more fascinating passages from his essay “Sens de la musique” (*Suisse contemporaine: revue mensuelle* 1 [January 1944], 31–8). In an effort to describe the network of interrelationships among what he then designated as the four fundamental musical elements, he observed that “a simple sound already produces a harmonic series that constitutes a melodic element in some way. Moreover, variation of intensity in a sound causes a fluctuation of the sound’s pitch, which constitutes an interference and another connection with the melodic element. As soon as a rhythm is struck with a solitary note, it forms a rudimentary but audible melody (a strike, for example, on two drums of different size), while at the same time the harmonic relations, by the crossing and coincidence of the melodic lines, form a type of polyphony of the sounds and resultant chords again by interference between rhythm and the other elements” (Scelsi, “Sens de la musique,” 35): “[U]n simple son produit déjà une série d’harmoniques qui constituent en quelque sorte un élément mélodique. De plus, la différence d’intensité d’un son provoque une fluctuation de la hauteur du son, ce qui constitue une interférence et un autre rapport avec l’élément mélodique. Dès qu’un rythme n’est plus frappé sur une seule note, il forme un mélodie rudimentaire mais perceptible (une percussion, par exemple, sur deux tambours de grandeur différente) tandis que, en même temps, les harmoniques relatifs, par les croisements et les rencontres des lignes mélodiques, forment une sorte de polyphonie dont les sons et accords résultants constituent encore des interférences entre le rythme et les autres éléments.”

Likewise, dynamic swells and timbral mutations generate perceived fluctuations of pitch, and so on.

Thus, in addition to microtonal inflection, timbral metamorphosis, dynamic shaping, and harmonic relief as discrete techniques for energizing and animating sounds that might otherwise be perceived as immobile, Scelsi also began to exploit the interactions among these parameters. In Example 10 from *Triphon*, the pitch content at first glance appears rather static, largely confined on the staff to the space between F and a quarter-tone above. In reality, the “oscillations” produce constant variations of pitch. But even the constancy of this oscillatory state does not produce a sense of stagnation, for it combines with continual changes in the bowing and the dynamics. All of these parametric alterations produce timbral metamorphoses, which in turn are enhanced by the alternation and overlapping of the two strings (notated on the two staves), the lower of which includes the buzzing metallic mute. Every parameter persists in an ongoing state of change, each one enhanced by changes in the others. The accumulated result is the marvelously detailed shaping of a single sound that is sharply focused, yet remains in constant flux in all parameters.

In most of Scelsi’s mature sonorist works, broad structural relationships and processes play a significant role in the music’s ability to maintain coherence as concentrated sounds are projected over extended periods of time. Of the two cello works of the 1950s, *Dithome* represents a particularly important step in the evolution of this trait. While the tripartite structure of *Triphon* (“three sounds”) manifests conspicuously in its

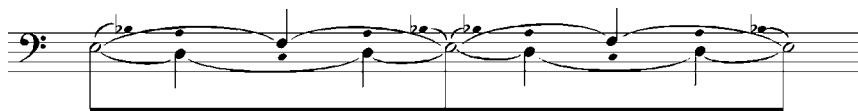
The musical score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system is labeled (I-II c.) and (III-IV c.). The second system is unlabeled but continues the same two-staff format. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *p*, *mp*, *f*, and *mf*. There are also performance instructions like *nat.* and *pont.* with brackets and arrows indicating specific techniques. The music is characterized by dense, overlapping textures and frequent changes in dynamics and articulation.

Example 10. Scelsi, *Triphon*, Movement I, p. 5–6.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Song (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

three separate movements, the bipartite structure of *Dithome* (“two sections”) is not immediately obvious. The work is cast in one long movement lasting approximately thirteen minutes—one of the longest single movements of Scelsi's sonorist period.⁵⁹ In the liner notes to her definitive recording of the piece, Utti identifies the work's structure as a type of mirror form, but she provides little detail about it.⁶⁰ The structure comprises, in fact, a continuous and nearly exact palindrome that includes essentially three types of material: broad, predominantly linear statements focused on E at the beginning, middle, and end of the piece; intervening harmonic passages focused on D or F that take full advantage of the cello's double-stop capacity; and transitional moments of turbulent and extremely virtuosic string crossing, from which no focal pitch emerges. The significance of D and F as the interim focal points is that they lie on either side of the work's primary axis pitch of E. Thus, there emerges a background structure, illustrated in Example 11, in which the interim axes of D and F generate a large-scale oscillation around E.

The revelation of such a well-formed structure is problematic, as it directly conflicts with Scelsi's anti-structuralist aesthetic. Borrowing freely from Rudhyar, Scelsi argued in *Son et musique* that the new, more spiritual music he envisioned should be based upon the internal world of isolated sounds, not the external relationships between one sound and others. The suggestion that the different pitch axes of *Dithome* relate to one another structurally seems impossible to reconcile with the composer's aesthetic as he stated it. Indeed, I suspect that Scelsi himself struggled with this vexing problem. Perhaps for Scelsi, as for the critic or analyst, this simply remained an anomaly. On the



Example 11. Scelsi, *Dithome* (Background Structure).

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

⁵⁹The single movement of *Anahit* (1965), for violin and chamber orchestra, lasts roughly as long as *Dithome*; which of these is longer depends only upon the tempi of a particular performance. Scelsi's longest continuous movement is certainly not *Hymnos* (1963) for orchestra—a one-movement work lasting approximately eleven minutes—as has twice been asserted (Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Hurqualia; Hymnos; Chukrum*, Orchestre et chœur de la Radio-Télévision de Cracovie, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard, Accord CD201112 [1990], 7; Riccardo Schulz, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *The Orchestral Works I*, Carnegie Mellon Philharmonic & Concert Choir, Mode CD 95 [2001], 3).

⁶⁰Utti, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Trilogia; Ko-Tha*, 2.

other hand, Scelsi may have found some way to bring such structural relationships into accord with his sonorist aesthetic. If Scelsi thought of localized activity around a pitch axis not as a vacillation comprising distinct sounds, but as the animated, fluctuating projection of a single, expanded sound, then the same would hold true for the macrostructural oscillation around E in *Dithome*. From this perspective, the entire work constitutes a projection of E—a prolongation in Schenkerian terminology—within which elements of its sound world become localized points of convergence.

The projection of one primary pitch axis in *Dithome* as a frame for its macrostructure apparently confirmed for Scelsi that a single axis might feasibly serve for a complete movement. If one long movement like that of *Dithome* could maintain one primary axis with periodic departures to secondary ones (understood as elements of the primary orbit), then a shorter movement could certainly maintain a single axis throughout simply by expunging the secondary axes. Thus, in the instrumental works that followed *Dithome* directly (*Tre pezzi* for trombone, *Elegia per Ty*, the String Trio, *I presagi*, the *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra, and *Kya*), Scelsi chose not to use one structural process for a single long movement, but to return to the three- and four-movement designs that characterize the majority of his solo works of the mid 1950s. This tendency might indicate Scelsi's persistent reliance on a structural norm of Western musical convention that he had employed since the beginning of his career. In his modernist music of the 1930s and 1940s, the neoclassical use of the sonata cycle formed an important part of the historicism that underlies such works as the String Quartet No. 1 (1944).⁶¹ One could certainly argue that Scelsi's continued use of multi-movement schemata constitutes an element of the neoclassical aesthetic that survived long into his sonorist period. Nonetheless, Scelsi may also have believed that a series of individual movements, each one relatively brief and using a single axis, would effectively project the anti-teleological sonorous focus he desired.

Yet Scelsi never fully resolved the questions of whether single- or multi-movement works suited his aesthetic of timelessness more convincingly, and whether to employ structural processes within one movement, among separate movements, or not at all. In the multi-movement designs of many of Scelsi's apogean instrumental pieces of the 1960s (*Hurqualia*, *Aiôn*, String Quartet No. 2, String Quartet No. 3, *Chukrum*, *Uaxuctum*, and *Konx-om-pax*), a significant relationship among the axes of the different movements often exists, though not necessarily with one primary axis

⁶¹See my "Thematic Transformation, Stylistic Fusion, and Historical Allusion in Giacinto Scelsi's String Quartet No. 1" in *Das Streichquartett in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Beat Föllmi (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2004), 305–20.

for the entire work. In a few cases, individual movements from these works even exhibit an autonomous structural process, such as the palindromes that occur in the first movement of *Chukrum* and the third movement of String Quartet No. 2. At the same time, Scelsi continued to compose works built upon the model of *Dithome*: one movement with a single structural process unfolding, as found also in *Hymnos*, String Quartet No. 4, and *Anahit*.⁶²

The most significant work to follow *Dithome* directly was the remarkable String Trio (1958), cast in four movements. In the first two movements, a severe monotonality obtains, the first movement focused on B \flat , and the second on F \sharp . The three instruments never stray farther than a half-step from the axis, the activity converging on the axis itself and the quartertones adjacent to it. Sustained unisons and octaves (rarely more than one octave at a time) are animated with techniques Scelsi had already explored on the separate strings of the cello in *Triphon* and *Dithome*, chiefly vibrato and microtonal detuning: one instrument holds its pitch while another diverges by a quartertone. In the trio's third movement, pitch axes of B and D \sharp alternate, suggesting not opposition, but an underlying consonance that occasionally emerges as a harmonic major third or minor sixth. As Harry Halbreich has pointed out, the harmonic dimension of this movement points toward similar techniques that appear in later sonorist works, although the same is true for the double-stopped harmonic explorations of *Dithome*.⁶³ The trio's fourth movement focuses, extraordinarily, on the pitch a quartertone above C, one of the few movements in Scelsi's sonorist output that uses as its axis a pitch extrinsic to the

⁶²For analyses of the underlying structural processes of these works, see the following: for *Hymnos*, Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Hurqualia; Hymnos; Chukrum*, 7; for String Quartet No. 4, Martin Zenck, "Das Irreduktible als Kriterium der Avantgarde: Überlegen zu den vier Streichquartetten Giacinto Scelsis," in *Giacinto Scelsi*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 1983), 69–73; and for *Anahit*, Julian Anderson, "La Note Juste: Julian Anderson Celebrates the 90th Anniversary of Giacinto Scelsi's Birth," *The Musical Times* 136 (January 1995), 22–7. Scelsi also used one-movement structures in three works for string ensemble of the mid 1960s: *Anagamin, Ohoi*, and *Natura renovatur*.

⁶³Halbreich, "The String Quartets, String Trio, *Khoom*," liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Les Cinq Quatuors à Cordes; Trio a Cordes; Khoom*, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard, Salabert/Actuels CD 8904–5 (1990), 30. Halbreich does not mention any specific works in which this harmonic technique later appears, saying only that the trio's third movement "is a first step leading to the reconquest of the harmonic parameter, which will develop ever more strongly in the following works" [emphasis added]. The implication here is that in strictly monotonal movements, such as the first two of the trio and all four of the ensuing *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi sacrificed the harmonic parameter for the sake of sonorous focus. I would argue, rather, that Scelsi's increasingly focused expressions in these works amount to a distillation of the harmonic parameter rather than an abnegation of it, and that the conventionally harmonic intervals in works like the Third String Quartet and *Hymnos* proceeded from Scelsi's exploitation of the consonance of the harmonic series. As we have seen, the inception of this technique actually extends back through the double-stops of *Dithome* to the gong evocations of the Eighth and Ninth Piano Suites.

chromatic scale.⁶⁴ Equally notable, in the middle of the movement, a slow *portamento* ascent by all three instruments from the axis up nearly a minor third to E_b, and then back down anticipates an important gesture in the first of the *Quattro pezzi* for chamber orchestra, as well as the axial ascent that occurs in the Fourth String Quartet.⁶⁵

ATTAINMENT OF A SONORIST STYLE: THE QUATTRO PEZZI

Despite the attainment of monotonalism and the anticipation of later techniques in the String Trio, its rather uniform timbral complexion neglects what was to become one of the essential features of Scelsi's mature sonorist style. The work features a limited variety of bowing techniques, sparse use of double-stops, and a relatively narrow pitch compass. The result is considerably less timbral diversity than even that of *Dithome*. Although the String Trio represents an important precursor to the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi's employment of monotonalism in the work still seems somewhat tentative, a cautious first attempt to apply his recent discoveries to ensemble music. Scelsi certainly knew that the effective projection of the limitless sonic potential of a single note would require the timbral variety of a larger and more diverse ensemble of instruments. Indeed, Rudhyar had already affirmed it. Even though Rudhyar's suggestion to treat the piano as a big gong had helped to launch Scelsi on his sonorist path, Rudhyar ultimately envisioned the piano as a stepping stone to "the Western orchestra as a supreme gong."⁶⁶ He felt that the orchestra's extensive timbral variety offered the greatest potential among all conventional Western performance media for achieving a music in which "the energy of sound flows uninterrupted."⁶⁷ Writing in 1928, Rudhyar also realized that:

[t]he big modern orchestras are far, very far indeed, from fulfilling such requirements The sonorous substance does not flow consistently: neither melodically nor harmonically. Western composers have

⁶⁴Halbreich and Robin Freeman both maintain that the tempered C serves as the axis of the fourth movement (Halbreich, "The String Quartets," 30; Robin Freeman, "Tanmatras: The Life and Work of Giacinto Scelsi," *Tempo* 176 [March 1991], 15–6). The movement opens, however, with the violin and viola both playing a quartertone above C, and this microtone continues to sound more copiously than C through the remainder of the movement. Moreover, the movement concludes with the violin playing the quarter tone above C and the cello playing a low D_b, not a C as Halbreich asserts.

⁶⁵In place of a stationary pitch axis, the underlying structure of the Fourth Quartet comprises a gradual ascent by the entire ensemble from C up to B. See Zenck, "Das Irreduktible," 69–73.

⁶⁶Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27.

⁶⁷Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27.

not yet fully learnt how to produce an organic body of sounds, though Wagner and a few recent composers have come very near it, especially Scriabin. They will hardly ever attain to such a mastery of sonorous metallurgy as long as Western melodies are series of jumps from note to note with sonorous emptiness in between.⁶⁸

Scelsi likely had this exhortation in mind throughout the 1950s, as he progressed from the piano to solo winds and strings to chamber ensembles and finally to the orchestra. He could not have taken up orchestral writing immediately in 1952, for he first needed to devise a compositional approach that would permit the “sonorous substance” to “flow consistently” and not jump “from note to note.” After *Triphon*, *Dithome*, and the String Trio, Scelsi had gathered all of the compositional tools he needed to realize the music that Rudhyar foretold.

Although Scelsi had already accomplished music on a single note in the String Trio and other selected works, the *Quattro pezzi (ciascuno su una nota sola)* of 1959 represents a particularly important milestone in his compositional career and signals the attainment of his fully developed sonorist style. Scelsi himself always looked back on the work as perhaps his most important,⁶⁹ and a number of external features indicate that he intended it to serve as a landmark. It was his first composition for orchestra (albeit chamber orchestra) since *La nascita del verbo* of 1948, another piece in which Scelsi attempted to synthesize his compositional knowledge. Yet, unlike *La nascita del verbo*, the *Quattro pezzi* did not mark the end of a traversal of styles but the complete maturation of a newly formed one. The didactic nature of the *Quattro pezzi* manifests explicitly in its declaratory subtitle: *Four Pieces (each one on a single note)*. The work provides a methodical demonstration of the compositional techniques Scelsi had painstakingly devised over the course of the previous seven years, applied to the highly concentrated sound that he now referred to as a “note.” At the same time, it serves to illustrate one of the central tenets of Scelsi's sonorist aesthetic: that a single “note” is not vapid and static but complex and dynamic—a limitless microcosm of sound.

The importance of the *Quattro pezzi* as a compositional milestone, exceeding that of the String Trio, lies in its application of the techniques for animating a focused sound in a timbrally diverse context. The work requires twenty-six players comprising a brass- and woodwind-dominated chamber ensemble of alto flute, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, four horns, saxophone (alto and tenor, one

⁶⁸Rudhyar, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, 27–8.

⁶⁹Michiko Hirayama, interview with the author, Rome, May 3, 1997.

player), three trumpets, two trombones, bass tuba, saw (or flexatone⁷⁰), timpani, bongos, tumba (a large conga drum), hanging cymbal, small and large tam-tams, two violas, two cellos, and double bass. Except for the percussion, all of the instruments in the ensemble have the capacity to produce quarter tones, as indeed they all do at some point in the composition. Each of the four movements features a unique combination of instruments; a few remain tacet in each movement but the fourth, which involves all twenty-six performers. Scelsi exploits the timbral variety of the ensemble by using a stratified approach to orchestration that resembles Schoenberg's celebrated realization of *Klangfarbenmelodie* in the third of his *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16. Because of the extremely limited pitch spectra in each of Scelsi's pieces—even more distilled than Schoenberg's slowly changing harmonies—the overlapping entrances and cessations of different instruments manifest primarily as mutations of timbre. Another noteworthy feature of Scelsi's orchestration in the *Quattro pezzi* is the use of percussion to activate certain timbres. Important entrances and timbral changes seem to be sparked by simultaneous attacks in the percussion, a technique that appears prominently in the music of Varèse, among others, but which also probably relates to the metaphysical concept of *anahata*.⁷¹

Scelsi dealt with the problem of macrostructure in the *Quattro pezzi* by using four axes that suggest an interrelationship: F, B, A_b, and A. The axes of the first two movements form a tritone, an interval that Scelsi had already drawn on in *Dithome* to imply the opening up of sonic space.⁷² Just as the tritone divides the octave in half, the third movement's axis of A_b divides the F-B tritone equally into two minor thirds, an interval that makes a prominent linear appearance in the first movement at the same pitch level (F to A_b). The A axis of the fourth movement remains more difficult to explain. Giulio Castagnoli suggests that

⁷⁰“A modern instrument for special effects consisting of a small flexible metal sheet suspended in a wire frame ending in a handle. A wooden knob mounted on a strip of spring steel lies on each side of the metal sheet. The player shakes the instrument with a trembling movement which causes the beaters to strike the sides of the metal sheet. An eerie tremolo is thus produced, and the pitch altered by variable pressure on the sheet of metal.” James Blades and James Holland, “Flexatone,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 25 March 2005), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

⁷¹See Jonathan Bernard, *The Music of Edgard Varèse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 159–63.

⁷²The beginning of *Dithome* includes a linear tritone from the focal pitch E up to B_b, a gesture which has a space-opening effect almost like that of a Schenkerian *Anstieg* (initial ascent). Because every interval above or below E can be reduced to an interval no larger than a tritone (by inversion, by conversion from a compound to a simple interval, or both) the space between E and B_b comprehends the entire sound-world of the focal pitch. I submit that the gesture serves a symbolic, rather than perceptible, purpose, but it is one that Scelsi used fairly often in his mature sonorist works to introduce a focal note.

this note provides further subdivision of the minor third into its two intervallic segments: a semitone (A_b -A) and a whole tone (A-B).⁷³ It is an intriguing hypothesis, although it assigns an uncomfortable level of importance to the intervals of equal temperament, which the division of the octave by the tritone and the division of the tritone into two minor thirds do not. Alternatively, since the F-B space-opening motion of the first two movements implies the primacy of F as the initial axis presented, the A_b and A_b of the last two movements might suggest, by structural analogy, the consonance of major and minor sonorities built on F. Support for this hypothesis appears in the localized motion from F to A_b in the first movement, and the furtive yet significant return of F in the timpani in Movement IV.

The first movement comprises four increasingly powerful surges of sonic energy (beginning at measures 5, 11, 17, and 27), articulated by a combination of means.⁷⁴ The most prominent techniques are those that simply generate more sound, such as dynamic swells and increased instrumental density. These combine with more distinctly Scelsian techniques for the animation of concentrated sounds: active and energetic articulations (vibrato, trill, flutter tonguing, tremolo) and pitch inflection up a quartertone above the F axis.⁷⁵ Example 12 shows the fourth surge, the final and most active one of the movement.

It begins with the dynamic swell and upward microtonal inflection of the instruments already sounding (tenor saxophone, second trumpet, trombones, violas, and cello) with immediate reinforcement and timbral alteration supplied by the bass clarinet. Upon reaching the quartertone above the axial F, the second trumpet begins a vibrato, energizing the pitch and joining the continued vibrati of the cello and saxophone. In measure 28, the upper woodwinds enter, affecting the volume, density, and timbre of the aggregate sonority. Three of these instruments enter directly with the quartertone, while the second clarinet oscillates on either

⁷³Giulio Castagnoli, "Suono e processo nei *Quattro pezzi per orchestra (ciascuno su una nota sola)* (1956) [sic] di Giacinto Scelsi," in *Quaderni di Musica Nuova*, no. 1, ed. Giulio Castagnoli (Turin: Compositori Associati, 1987), 101.

⁷⁴Castagnoli designates these surges as "actual motion" ("moto esplicito") (Castagnoli, "Suono e processo," 93). He distinguishes only three passages of "actual motion," however, beginning at measures 5, 18, and 27. What I consider a second surge beginning at measure 11, Castagnoli regards as a continuation of the first.

⁷⁵One senses in listening to these surges that the dynamic swells and overall increase in sonic force somehow push the note up from its axis, as if bending it. Of course the principle of interdependence among the sonic parameters had already been incorporated into earlier compositions of the sonorist style, and its manifestation in the *Quattro pezzi* confirms its importance. Indeed, this trait continued in most of Scelsi's later sonorist music, in which microtonal inflections tend to move upward rather than downward and are usually accompanied by, perhaps even caused by, dynamic intensification.

Example 12. Scelsi, *Quattro pezzi*, Movement I, mm. 27–31.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

side of it. The climax of the surge begins in measure 29, where the large tam-tam activates the horns and double bass. Their second articulation on the downbeat of measure 30 accompanies strikes of both the small and large tam-tams, while in measure 31, the small tam-tam and hanging

cymbal activate the *fortissimo* dynamics and flutter tonguing of the brass instruments.

Alternating with the four surges in Movement I are five passages of relative calm (beginning at measures 1, 9, 15, 22, and 32), distinguished by quiet dynamic levels, sparse instrumentation, less active modes of sustain, and—with one important exception—adherence to the F axis.⁷⁶ These moments seem designed to evoke a certain stillness and quiescence from which the surges emanate, but without suggesting complete stasis, which would conflict with Scelsi's understanding of the nature of sound.⁷⁷ At the opening of the movement, for instance, four measures of seemingly static Fs covering one octave are enlivened by subtle dynamic fluctuations, a quartertone oscillation in the cello, and the timbral mutations of the *Klangfarbenmelodische* overlapping of clarinets, horns, and trumpets. The second calm passage, in measures 9–11, features an important and distinctive gesture: a two-stage linear sweep that Halbreich apparently considers melodic,⁷⁸ but in fact constitutes a brief quasi-pulmonary expansion of the sonic space around the F axis as far as a minor third (see Example 13). The importance of the minor third interval outlined here is difficult to assess, but equally difficult to ignore. It mirrors the large-scale structural relationship between the axes of the first and third movements, dividing the F-B tritone equidistantly. At the same time, its localized articulation provides the linear suggestion of the minor mode, traceable perhaps back to Scelsi's use of minor modalities in early sonorist works such as *Pwyll* and the Suite for flute and clarinet.

In the second movement, focused on B, Scelsi adds subtle exploitation of the harmonic series to the sonorist techniques he employs. Castagnoli has convincingly outlined a three-part structure for the movement.⁷⁹ The last of the movement's three sections, comprising its last twenty-four

⁷⁶Castagnoli characterizes these as “potential motion” (“moto latente”) (Castagnoli, “Suono e processo,” 93). Again, his analysis differs from mine: He identifies only four such passages, beginning at measures 1, 15, 21, and 36.

⁷⁷On this point I find Castagnoli's characterizations and choice of vocabulary flawed. In describing these passages as well as similar ones in the second movement, Castagnoli uses the term “stasis” in an absolute sense (“la stasi vera”). Not only does this assessment contradict Scelsi's sonorist aesthetic, it is not borne out by the music itself. Even when the amount of activity decreases sharply, as it does in these sections, there always remains some ongoing fluctuation in at least one parameter.

⁷⁸Harry Halbreich, liner notes to Giacinto Scelsi, *Quattro pezzi (su una nota sola); Anahit; Uaxuctum*, Orchestre de la Radio-Télévision de Cracovie, trans. Elisabeth Buzzard, Accord CD 200162 (1989), 24. Halbreich refers only generally to the melodic “unfolding” that takes place in the first movement. Because this sweep (and another like it towards the end of the movement) constitutes the only truly linear activity, I assume that Halbreich has this passage in mind.

⁷⁹Castagnoli, “Suono e processo,” 97–8.

The musical score is for measures 8–11 of Scelsi's *Quattro pezzi*, Movement I. It is in 3/4 time. The instruments and their parts are:

- cl. 1&2 (in C):** Starts with a *p* dynamic, playing a melodic line with a *port* instruction. Dynamics fluctuate between *p* and *pp*.
- bass cl.:** Enters in measure 9 with a *p* dynamic, playing a similar melodic line.
- hn. 3&4 (in F):** Enters in measure 9 with a *mf* dynamic, playing a melodic line. Dynamics include *mf* and *pp*. Circled numbers 4 and 9 are present.
- tbn. 1:** Enters in measure 9 with a *p* dynamic, playing a melodic line. Dynamics include *p* and *pp*. A *sord. cup* instruction is present. Circled numbers 4 and 9 are present.
- vla. 1&2:** Enters in measure 9 with a *p* dynamic, playing a melodic line. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. A *gliss.* instruction is present.
- cello & bass:** Enters in measure 9 with a *mp* dynamic, playing a melodic line. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. A *gliss.* instruction is present.

Example 13. Scelsi, *Quattro pezzi*, Movement I, mm. 8–11.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

measures, contains no microtonal departures from the axis and just one use of vibrato (the saw in measures 91–93), but does feature timbral enhancement of the axial B by the articulation and sustain of its third partial, F \sharp . It begins in the cello in the waning measures of the second section (at measure 73), as a powerful surge subsides and returns to the axis, and is sustained alternately by the first and second horns until measure 99, just five measures from the end of the movement. Scelsi clearly did not intend this F \sharp to be perceived as a separate note forming a conventional harmony with the B below it. It is played as a string harmonic in the cello, and the horns sustain the pitch at a dynamic level of *pianississimo* marked *quasi impercettibile*. With this F \sharp , Scelsi delicately accentuates an overtone that already exists in the timbre of the B fundamental, enhancing an effect that occurs naturally in the perception of complex sounds.

Example 14. Scelsi, *Quattro pezzi*, Movement III, mm. 24–28.

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

The most distinctive feature of Movement III is the emergence of simulated subharmonics in the bass clarinet. While most of the music in this movement remains concentrated in the ensemble's upper registers, when the wide oscillations around the A_b axis reach their highpoint at measure 24 (see Example 14), the bass clarinet enters two and a half octaves below the rest of the ensemble. The instrument's pitches (E, $F\sharp$, G, and A_b in measures 24–25, and B_b , A_b , E, and $C\sharp$ in measures 27–28) do not derive specifically from any acoustical calculation; they are not, for instance, the differential tones produced by the pitches sounding in the higher register. In this sense, the effect differs from that of the overtone enhancement of the previous movement, in which the $F\sharp$ third partial reflects the physics of the harmonic series somewhat accurately. Here, the notes of the bass clarinet create a resonant context for the tightly packed microtonal clusters of the horns, trumpets, and alto saxophone, suggesting, however imprecisely, that they exist as part of a more complex sonic envelope.

Movement IV comprises one sustained and particularly forceful surge, with the full power of the twenty-six performers brought to bear. Castagnoli describes the movement as a “recapitulation” of the first three, in which the sonorist processes previously introduced coalesce, reinforcing one another.⁸⁰ While most of the isolated features of the fourth movement do occur in earlier ones, certain distinctive techniques such as overtone and subharmonic enhancement do not recur here. Thus the final movement is perhaps best characterized not as a recapitulation of the earlier movements but as an intensification of *selected* features, especially those that Scelsi uses to energize sonorities. The registral expansion here extends to cover as many as five octaves. Rapid reiterations in groups of five or six sixteenth-notes had previously occurred only in the brass (in the third movement), but now manifest across the full range of the ensemble. The percussive triggering of certain timbres also intensifies, the sharp attack of the bongo even preceding by a thirty-second note the *sforzando* entrances of the woodwinds in measure 32, reinforcing the perception of a causal relationship.

Like the previous movements, the fourth begins quietly and with sparse instrumentation, but there are signs that the energy of the movement is already building. The triplet semitonal oscillation of the third horn and the rapid staccato reiterations of the first viola provide the first indications of developing intensity. The reiterations are taken over by the second horn in measure 9, where the axial pitch is pushed up a full semitone to B₂ in the double bass and low woodwinds at a *forte* dynamic level. Entrances of the timpani in measure 11 and the large tam-tam in measure 16 support the thickening texture. In measures 24–48 the movement—and indeed the entire work—reaches the apex of its power. To sustain intensity over a relatively long span, Scelsi combines nearly every technique at his disposal for the animation of isolated sounds, here layered atop one another in torrents of sound. Registral saturation expands to its widest compass of five octaves (measure 29). The percussion instruments increase the range of their activity beyond isolated timbral activations, now providing continuous impetus to the sustained notes of the ensemble. In the midst of this activity, the timpani articulates the cyclical return of F from Movement I, alternating with the current axis of A (see Example 15). The rhythmic dynamism of the percussion then extends to the rest of the ensemble beginning in measure 41, where rapid reiterations are taken up by the horns and double bass, quickly spreading to other instruments. The visceral energy of the fourth movement’s giant surge during these climactic bars is almost overwhelming. Whereas the first three movements of the *Quattro pezzi* provide somewhat methodical demonstrations of the means by which Scelsi was able to animate and sustain a concentrated sound, the fourth movement reveals its full intensity and sonic power.

⁸⁰Castagnoli, “Suono e processo,” 100.

The image shows a musical score for three percussion instruments: timpani (top staff), bongos (middle staff), and tumbos (bottom staff). The music is written in 3/4 time and consists of three measures. The timpani part starts with a dynamic of *p cresc.* and ends with *mf*. The bongos and tumbos parts start with *p cresc.* and end with *dimin.* There are markings of '6' above several notes in all three staves, likely indicating sixteenth notes. The notation is dense with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

Example 15. Scelsi: *Quattro pezzi*, Movement IV, mm.37–39 (Percussion).

© Editions Salabert (SACEM). All rights for the world on behalf of Editions Salabert (SACEM) administered by BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM). All rights in the US on behalf of BMG Music Publishing France SARL (SACEM) administered by BMG Songs (ASCAP). Used by Permission.

Scelsi had already devised the techniques necessary for sustaining concentrated sounds in earlier works, but their consummation required transference to a timbrally diverse medium—the chamber orchestra of the *Quattro pezzi*. Scelsi's control of the wide range of timbral possibilities in this and subsequent orchestral works seems to be an extension, perhaps even the perfection, of Schoenberg's concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Schoenberg's well-known explication of *Klangfarbenmelodie* seems appropriate not just in relation to the surface features of Scelsi's orchestration, but to the very core of his compositional aesthetic.

The distinction between tone color and pitch, as it is usually expressed, I cannot accept without reservations. I think the tone becomes perceptible by virtue of tone color, of which one dimension is pitch. Tone color is, thus, the main topic, pitch a subdivision. Now, if it is possible to create patterns out of tone colors that are differentiated according to pitch, patterns we call "melodies," progressions whose coherence evokes an effect analogous to thought processes, then it must also be possible to make such progressions out of the tone colors of the other dimension, out of that which we call simply "tone color" [timbre], progressions whose relations with one another work with a kind of logic entirely equivalent to that logic which satisfies us in the melody of pitches. That has the appearance of futuristic fantasy and is probably just that. But it is one which, I firmly believe, will be realized.⁸¹

Schoenberg articulates in this passage the idea that a single *tone* is multi-dimensional, comprising both timbre and pitch (as well as volume), a notion fundamental to Scelsi's sonorist aesthetic. To this Scelsi added the principle of interdependence, that variations in one dimension can produce changes in another. The *Quattro pezzi* constituted a compositional

⁸¹Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 421–2.

breakthrough not simply because each piece adheres to a single note—which Scelsi had done in earlier works—but because the full control of timbre allowed him at last to reveal that note’s infinite variety.

CONCLUSIONS

The genesis of Scelsi’s single-note music, beginning in the years following his crisis and convalescence, was a gradual evolutionary process through which Scelsi developed the techniques necessary to fulfill a radical theory suggested by the esoteric philosophies in which he had immersed himself. In lectures given in the 1920s and published sporadically over subsequent decades, Steiner had posited a revolutionary idea about the possibility of deriving a complete and gratifying musical experience from a single sound. Scelsi’s exposure to the idea came at an opportune moment, for it offered him a fresh alternative to the historically-oriented styles he felt had been exhausted. Moreover, his study of theosophy and practice of yoga, undertaken during his psychological recovery, introduced him to Hindu metaphysical concepts that befitted Steiner’s notions about “the secret of the individual tone.”

The decisive encounter in Scelsi’s evolution, however, was with the writings of Dane Rudhyar. We do not know precisely when Scelsi first gained exposure to Rudhyar’s books, but Scelsi’s apparent familiarity with the ideas they contain seems to have had a profound influence on his aesthetic. The fact that Scelsi appropriated entire passages from Rudhyar’s writings is significant not because it exposes Scelsi as a charlatan or dilettante—characterizations that continue to cloud his reception⁸²—but because it indicates convincingly the importance Scelsi assigned to Rudhyar’s ideas during the crucial period when he began to devise his new style. Of the myriad sources that contributed

⁸²Charges of dilettantism continue to surround Scelsi primarily because of the controversy sparked by Vieri Tosatti’s notorious article “Giacinto Scelsi c’est moi” (*Il Giornale della Musica* 5/35 [January 1989], 1 and 10), in which Tosatti, Scelsi’s musical assistant for many years, claims essential authorship of many of Scelsi’s works. The article quickly produced a deluge of published responses from defenders of Scelsi’s musical integrity. See Aldo Brizzi and Carlo Fischetti, “Altre verità su Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/36 (February 1989), 1 and 10; Giulio Castagnoli, “Lettere: Quell’articolo ottocentesco su Giacinto Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/36 (February 1989), 31; Roman Vlad, “Quelle ‘lezioni’ di Vlad a Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/37 (March 1989), 1; Vieri Tosatti, Robin Freeman, Giuseppe Gavazza, and Federico Biscione, “Lettere: Caso Scelsi: il dilettante e i ‘professionisti,’” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/37 (March 1989), 31; Harry Halbrich, and Aldo Clementi, “Lettere: Caso Scelsi: intervengono Halbreich e Clementi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/39 (May 1989), 30; Francesco Leprino, “Lettere: Ancora su Scelsi,” *Il Giornale della Musica* 5/40 (June 1989), 31; Guido Zaccagnini, ed., “Il compositore è una cooperativa? A proposito del Caso Scelsi,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989), 33–42; Lorenzo Ferrero, “Il re è nudo,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989), 36; Sergio Cafaro, “Io, Sergio Cafaro, dichiaro . . .,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989), 36; Michele Porzio, “Dilettanti artisti e professionisti accademici,” *Piano Time* 7/72 (March 1989), 37; Richard Trythall, “World View: Italy,” *Keyboard* 15/11 (November 1989), 25.

to Scelsi's transformed aesthetic, only the composer Rudhyar offered useful suggestions as to how Scelsi might proceed in the creation of a new musical style. In his discussions of the Oriental gong, Rudhyar sought to describe how a limitless sonic source and the monistic unity of all sound could be perceived, not as metaphysical concepts but as actual musical experience. Rudhyar's characterization of the piano as a sort of big gong, more than any other image, launched Scelsi on his new course.

Scelsi first brought Rudhyar's ideas to fruition in the fourth and fifth movements of the Eighth Piano Suite, where he simulated the overtone complexity of a gong's timbre by stacking up pitches over a stable and seemingly motionless fundamental. In the Ninth Piano Suite, this idea pervades the work, alternating increasingly protracted gong evocations with movements of oscillatory activity around localized pitch axes. In *Son et musique*, Scelsi spoke of the "oscillations at the interior of sounds," and in the Ninth Suite he attempted to simulate that effect.⁸³ It was a crucial early step, but the tempered design of the piano restricted him from developing the idea further. Turning, therefore, to solo works for winds and strings, Scelsi began to incorporate microintervals into his works as he developed the means to project increasingly concentrated sounds. Of particular importance, he achieved in *Dithome* a level of such concentration that the slightest variations in one musical parameter influence the others in a perceptible manner. Continuing on the path that Rudhyar had envisioned, Scelsi began to adapt these techniques to chamber ensembles and, ultimately, to the orchestra—Rudhyar's "supreme gong" of Western music.

Having achieved the consummation of his style in the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi went on to compose some of his most remarkable music during the 1960s. In orchestral works he expanded his timbral and dynamic palette even further, adding orchestral instruments (generally low-pitched ones, with more resonant qualities), the organ, and even chorus. Yet, he clearly did not feel bound to the orchestral medium, completing three string quartets between 1961 and 1964 that crown his achievements in chamber music. In 1960, he began working with Michiko Hirayama, whose background and extraordinary abilities demonstrated that the compositional principles of Scelsi's sonorist style could be applied to the solo vocal medium to great effect. In all of his works he expanded the harmonic dimension of his style and devised ingenious structural designs both between and within movements. It is particularly interesting that, following the *Quattro pezzi*, Scelsi felt free to explore his unique brand of sonorism in any medium and without strict adherence to a single pitch axis. The *Quattro pezzi* had demonstrated not that a piece of music *must* adhere to a single note, but that it *could*. For even in the most infinitesimal portion of the pleroma, carved out by the artist, there exists limitless potential.

⁸³Scelsi, *Son et musique*, 1.

Copyright of *Journal of Musicological Research* is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.