



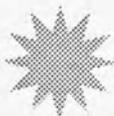
*About  
the  
Author*

Harold Oliver is Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Rowan College. He has a B.M. from the Peabody Conservatory, an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, and a Ph.D. from Princeton University. He has studied music composition with Mel Powell, Donald Martino, Gunther Schuller, and Milton Babbitt.

He has received fellowships, commissions, and awards from Yale, Princeton, Tanglewood, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Meet The Composer, and the American Music Center.

His compositions number over thirty works and have been performed throughout Europe and in the United States. He is published by Margum Music, Carl Fischer, Inc., The ASUC Journal of Musical Scores, Perspectives of New Music, and the Association for the Promotion of New Music.

## *Some Thoughts on Creativity*



*Harold Oliver*

Creativity can be viewed as an epiphany, an emergence into awareness or perception. Creativity is a subjective, private, personal experience: the conscious manifestation of something that was previously unconscious and thus effectively nonexistent. It cannot be taught. It can be encouraged or discouraged and, possibly, can even be induced.

Although creativity may in some cases result in a “product” that can be perceived and evaluated by others, this materialization in the form of a product is the exception rather than the rule. In any case, creativity should not be confused with productivity or originality. On those few occasions when a “product” that can be shared is the objective result of creativity, this product need not be entirely “original”; indeed, most “creative works” merely replicate other “creative works” in many respects. A truly original product, one that is substantially unique, is a maverick, which may either prove in time to be a monstrosity or, more rarely, be accepted culturally as an environmentally successful adaptation.

Culturally, and within the academic environment, when one speaks about creativity, one is probably referring instead

to productivity, originality, and craftsmanship, or skill. Usually, one is concerned with creativity only insofar as it can be channeled into demonstrable and conventional norms within some "discipline." However, this process of restricting creative thought to utilitarian purposes is inevitably constricting, inhibiting, and destructive to the creative process itself. Also, products that are for some reason preserved within the culture are valued not because of their intrinsic creativity (whatever that may mean) but for other values that relate to the power structure that prevails at any given time or place.

Creativity is a notion that is given superficial attention within our culture. It is frequently referred to and studied from a variety of perspectives as if it were highly valued. Nevertheless, creativity, by its very nature, is subversive and thus at odds with established cultural values. In fact, creativity is, understandably, discouraged, particularly when it occurs in an "unchanneled" or pure form. The encouragement of creativity actually disrupts productivity and can lead to results that are counterproductive or dangerous for the status quo. Thus, much of what is said about creativity is remote from the actual process itself and relates rather to productivity and performance. We are a performance-based and goal-directed society. Creativity obeys different laws: it does not "punch a clock" but is more timeless and universal; it is more involved with incorporating the uncomfortably divergent and unknown into the already known than it is in providing socially convenient results.

People are impressed, superficially, with new gadgets and events, and most of these things can be ingeniously traced to some person with an idea or a perception. However, the actual creative thought is by its very nature abstract; objects arise from the struggle between the original concept and the medium of its expression. There is an enormous distance between the idea and its physical manifestation. The object or product assumes a value for the creator through the interaction between ideas and the materials of the medium in which these ideas are "worked out." In this sense, the object

produced represents a historical record of an internal journey, of the lived experience of the struggle to know and possess something externally that is actually projected from the interior of the creative individual's soul.

This "meaning" of the object can only partially be shared with others. At most, the others can attempt to project their own internal struggles onto the object and thus recreate it as if it were their own. There can be no objective measure of the degree of correspondence in meaning between that which is experienced initially by the creator and that of the recreators; these meanings are probably quite distinct. When one speaks about creativity and communication, there is reason to believe that what is communicated is entirely different from that in more normal objective discourse, as in, for example, when one says: "Please pass the salt."