

Paul Gallagher composer_long bio (389 words)

PAUL GALLAGHER (1953–2011) made enduring contributions to the artistic possibilities of just intonation. His body of work is now being reconsidered as a missing chapter in American musical innovation. His legacy includes a rare feat, a four-movement symphony for full orchestra in just intonation that premiered at the American Festival of Microtonal Music in New York in 1987.

Born in Pittsburgh, Paul Gallagher received his B.A. in music from the Pennsylvania State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. in composition from the State University of New York at Buffalo, studying under Morton Feldman and Lejaren Hiller. His orchestral, instrumental, and vocal compositions have been performed in New York, Copenhagen and Pittsburgh.

Attracted to the exceptional clarity of the microtonal system known as just intonation, Paul Gallagher derived a musical language from the array of overtones that naturally emanate from a given tone, giving particular attention to the most consonant intervals between the pitches of the series. Reflecting his interest in harmony as both a sonic and philosophical value, he then used those same ratios to determine every element of his compositions — his holistic response to the human discord and catastrophic degradation of the natural world he saw as inherent in modern worldviews.

"From the outset, it was clear to me that the quality and richness of these harmonies, drawn untempered from the overtone series, would demand their own language and syntax ... so I began to develop a style that unfolds from the intervals themselves and the way they relate to each other," he wrote. "Rhythms, melodies, phrase structures, etc., were all derived from the same proportions as the harmonies. Thus the material — melodic, harmonic, rhythmic — reflects itself in the overall structure and at all levels between."

"My use of just intonation stems from an interest in harmony both aurally and philosophically," he wrote. "Each partial of an overtone series is itself a fundamental, casting its own series of partials. Yet, this myriad of partials and fundamentals is not heard as a complexity but as a single composite sound."

"In each facet of Being can be seen both its fundamental identity and its relative or partial identity," he wrote. "To observe that each facet constantly embraces both poles is to see that they are in fact a single identity and to understand harmony as an inevitable reality."

Press contact: For inquiries and interviews, please contact paulgallagherinquiries@gmail.com

<https://www.paulgallaghermusic.com>

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Paul Gallagher: Harmony for Our Time

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