

# PAUL GALLAGHER: Harmony for Our Time

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Microtonal University Composers Panel  
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## I. INTRODUCTION: ALREADY GONE

"Perhaps the buzz of amusement will here and there erode our carefully sculpted poise of permanence. ... I'm already gone, already gone ..."

— "Already Gone," Paul Gallagher<sup>1</sup>

Yellowed scores were stored in cardboard boxes in the damp cellar. Some wound up in the musty suburban basement of a client of his widow. Tapes were in a barn in Central Pennsylvania. The obsolete audio equipment needed to play them no longer worked, so there was no way to hear what was on them.

By the time I was able to obtain copyright in 2018, six-and-a-half years after my brother's death, his music was at risk of vanishing. His since-deceased widow had done her best to preserve what she could and had undertaken some sparsely attended performances, but a series of moves and her own ill health had left the legacy in disarray.

Six months after securing the rights, my sister Laura Protzman and I established a new website and social media presence.<sup>2</sup> By sheer coincidence, two weeks after the website's launch in February 2019, Paul Gallagher's signature work for orchestra was suddenly plucked from obscurity and made available for download. Johnny Reinhard<sup>3</sup> had begun unearthing selections from his 40-year archive of live American Festival of Microtonal Music recordings and posting them on Bandcamp, including the "wonderful" rediscovery of the four-movement symphony "Way of the Hopi" that premiered in 1987.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gallagher, "Already Gone," SATB quartet, 1997, [paulgallaghermusic.com](http://paulgallaghermusic.com)

<sup>2</sup> [paulgallaghermusic.com](http://paulgallaghermusic.com), [soundcloud.com/paulgallaghercomposer](https://soundcloud.com/paulgallaghercomposer), [twitter.com/Harmony4OurTime](https://twitter.com/Harmony4OurTime)

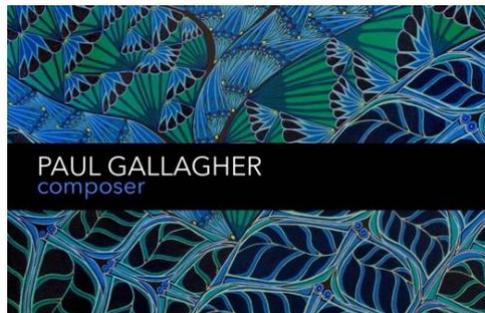
<sup>3</sup> Johnny Reinhard, director, American Festival of Microtonal Music, <http://afmm.org>.

<sup>4</sup> "Way of the Hopi," symphony in just intonation for four pieces, Paul Gallagher, 1986. That a listenable recording exists owes something to luck and perseverance. For whatever technical reason, the initial Bandcamp file produced from the AFMM master outputted as a series of arbitrarily spaced tracks, marring the recording with a hiccup effect. And of the two old recordings in my possession, one was incomplete and the other would not play and had been left at the audio repair shop, where it was now nowhere to be found. Meanwhile, the shop owner was undergoing medical treatment and increasingly unavailable. After weeks of patience, friendly visits to inquire after his health, and additional financial inducement in the form of more equipment to refurbish, the missing tape surfaced, though it also turned out to be incomplete. But digital dicing and splicing by Bruce Morris, my husband, produced a faithful file for Johnny Reinhard to repost:



Johnny Reinhard

Slowly, the music of Paul Gallagher started to be listened to and remarked upon. Today, 35 years after "Hopi" was written, 10 years after the composer's death at age 58, and three years after his catalogue was resurrected online, his music is being discussed in the same breath as that of the masters of 20th century contemporary classical music composed in the alternative tuning system known as just intonation.<sup>5</sup>



[PaulGallagherMusic.com](http://PaulGallagherMusic.com) © C. Gallagher

But how had this music slipped so far beneath the radar?

Good, even great, music disappears all the time. Timing; chance; connections; personality; geography; structural factors of race, gender, wealth — even when all these things fall your way, the world is not perfect at deciding what is worth supporting.<sup>6</sup> Even for composers who achieve a fair degree of recognition in their

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<https://johnnyreinhard.bandcamp.com/album/existential-paul-gallagher-robert-bonotto-tigran-mansurjan-toby-twinning-skip-laplante-jukka-tiensuu-john-cage-sonatas-and-interludes-for-prepared-piano-american-festival-of-microtonal-music>

<sup>5</sup> See comments in the Just Intonation Network Facebook group of March 3, 2020,

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2204994219/posts/10157902882159220>.

<sup>6</sup> New-music presenters and advocacy groups have begun actively seeking out composers and performers from underrepresented groups, and the classical music establishment is beginning to program music that had long been dismissed because of the composer's gender or race — Florence Price and Clara Schumann, among others.

See, for example, the Database of Repertoire by Underrepresented Composers, <https://americanorchestras.org/databases-of-repertoire-by-underrepresented-composers/>

lifetimes, absent a proactive publisher and continued robust demand, the time and money required to preserve and promote a legacy can become unsustainable.<sup>7</sup> In Paul Gallagher's case, by the time he died in 2011, his music was in many ways already gone. Tellingly, when the "Hopi" post appeared on Facebook in 2018, few recalled the symphony — or the composer. Similarly, upon noticing online praise for the chamber orchestra piece "Palongawhoya,"<sup>8</sup> Donald Bousted, the late artistic director of Microtonal Projects, shared a link to the Paul Gallagher website with a comment that summed up the situation in a nutshell: "Very interesting composer, new to me."<sup>9</sup>



Donald Bousted

Though health was not the only factor in this disappearing act, it exacerbated all the rest. Even during his productive years, Paul Gallagher was at times unable to compose or pursue performance opportunities for extended periods. In the last decade of his life he started few new compositions and finished none.

One consequence was a small catalogue. Fewer compositions meant fewer concerts and recordings, which meant fewer reviews or other ways to learn of his music. A prime illustration: Although the premiere of "Hopi" in New York was met with enthusiasm by the large Merkin Hall audience and festival orchestra musicians, no critics were in attendance, and in that pre-internet era the symphony soon entered oblivion, where it remained for more than three decades until Johnny Reinhard shared it on Facebook.

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<sup>7</sup> The composers collective and nonprofit music publisher Frog Peak Music is dedicated to preserving and promoting the collections of select experimental and path-breaking composers. Its directors call it a labor of love, and time may tell whether such a solution will prove sustainable and scalable. <http://frogpeak.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Paul Gallagher, "Palongawhoya," for chamber orchestra, 1981, [https://soundcloud.com/paulgallaghercomposer/palongawhoya?utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/paulgallaghercomposer/palongawhoya?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

<sup>9</sup> Donald Bousted, <https://donaldbusted.com/>



Which points to another factor: technology. Streaming, downloads, social media sharing — had all that existed during the productive peak of Paul Gallagher's short career, presumably he would have embraced the digital revolution as a means of staying visible and vital. In the doctoral composition program at SUNY Buffalo<sup>10</sup> he became excited about the implications for opera of advances in video and sound technology, and had studied under Lejaren Hiller<sup>11</sup> and was a classmate and housemate of Charles Ames,<sup>12</sup> two pioneers in computerized composition. Financial limitations, however, kept him continually behind the tech curve.<sup>13</sup>

That said, technology gets a networking-averse person only so far. The Just Intonation Network had formed way back in 1985 and by the mid-1990s maintained a website and presented concerts of music by luminaries as well as lesser-known JI composers.<sup>14</sup> A Yahoo tuning list that required no internet access existed in the late 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Evidently he did not participate in either. Isolation and anonymity went from being a periodic habit to his default.

Yet, the desire to compose in just intonation never left him. At the time of his death he had started work on a requiem in JI.

<sup>10</sup> The former State University of New York at Buffalo is now known as the University at Buffalo, <https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/music/graduate/phd-composition.html>

<sup>11</sup> See Allan Kozinn, "Lejaren Hiller: First Composer to Write Music With a Computer," New York Times, February 1, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/01/obituaries/lejaren-hiller-69-first-composer-to-write-music-with-a-computer.html>

<sup>12</sup> Charles Ames, <http://www.frogpeak.org/fartists/fpages.html>, <http://charlesames.net/about/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> He was well acquainted with the need to support those who devote their lives to music. The Paul Gallagher Scholarship covered one participant's Microtonal University tuition for this year, with plans to support more next year. <http://microtonaluniversity.org/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> The Just Intonation Network now functions as a Facebook group. Its defunct website is archived online, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050310195745/http://www.justintonation.net/concerts.html>

<sup>15</sup> See [yahootuninggroupsultimatebackup.github.io](http://yahootuninggroupsultimatebackup.github.io)

## II. THE IMPERATIVE OF JUST INTONATION

"If the tuning is good and it sounds right, people shouldn't notice it, in a way. ... If people aren't worried about what the tuning is and are really enjoying what they're hearing ... then I think we're doing the right thing."

— harpsichordist Rebecca Pechefsky<sup>16</sup>

To a listener, should tuning matter? It tends to matter to people's ears, even if they don't know why. But should those who write music using unconventional pitch regimens make a point of calling attention to their approach? Or should music live or die based simply on whether audiences feel it stirs the heart or engages the intellect or recalibrates the central nervous system in the right direction?

To a composer, of course, the tuning system matters greatly. Most stick with the standard Western tempered system of 12 equally spaced pitch frequencies to the octave, the chromatic scale of the piano. But fascination with nonstandard tunings — broadly defined as microtonal<sup>17</sup> — has burgeoned, maybe not hugely among the listening public but certainly among a widening subset of composers, music theorists and hobbyists, all made possible by a proliferation of composing software and hardware and music theory advancements with which to experiment and share online one's mathematical solutions and audio outputs.

When Paul Gallagher embraced just intonation<sup>18</sup> in 1980, it and other forms of microtonality represented a far fringier departure, and from the start he made a point

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<sup>16</sup> Rebecca Pechefsky, harpsichordist and board member of the American Festival of Microtonal Music, from a Microtonal University discussion via Zoom, February 20, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> The term *microtonal* is widely considered problematic, but no consensus has emerged on a replacement. See, for example, the blog entry by Sevish, "Why I Don't Like the Word Microtonal," <https://com/2016/why-i-dont-like-the-word-microtonal/>. Some prefer *xenharmonic*, a term coined by Ivor Darreg, <http://www.frogpeak.org/fpartists/fpdarreg.html>. Film score composer Stephen James Taylor uses "transcendent tonality," <http://stephenjamestaylor.com/sjt/microtonality.html>. Johnny Reinhard likes to note that "all music is microtonal" and often uses "polymicrotonal."

<sup>18</sup> Theorists and practitioners debate the exact bounds of what constitutes just intonation. See Joseph Monzo's discussion at TonalSoft, <http://www.tonalsoft.com/enc/jjjust.aspx>.

of calling attention to that differentiation. He liked being different, no question there. But at its core, his identification with just intonation was deeply artistic. In the end, you might say he and just intonation both benefitted. Both took on new dimensions of expressive power from their partnership.

### Philosophical Appeal

Particularly in the early goings, just intonation suited his back-to-nature mindset. Its basis in the harmonic series of natural versus man-made pitch relationships lent it that aura of purity that today is considered debatable but at the time evoked the hippie ethic he was practically the poster child for.



Paul Gallagher,  
Pennsylvania State University, 1975

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One generally accepted definition: "Just intonation is any system of tuning in which all of the intervals can be represented by ratios of whole numbers, with a strongly implied preference for the smallest numbers compatible with a given musical purpose."

See also: John Paul Swoger-Ruston, "Harmonic Intonation and Implication (Analyses and Compositions)," University of Plymouth, 2006: "The term just intonation refers to a subset of the vast/infinite microtonal umbrella based on the frequency ratios that occur naturally between components of the harmonic series. These intervals are smooth and often referred to as 'pure,' as they sound smooth when compared to the same interval classes occurring in various tempered systems."

<https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10026.1/2473/JOHN%20PAUL%20SWOGER%20RUSTON%20VOLUME%201.PDF?sequence=1>

For a deeper dive, see: David P. Doty, *The Just Intonation Primer*,

[http://www.dbdoty.com/Words/Primer\\_2.1.html](http://www.dbdoty.com/Words/Primer_2.1.html), and Kyle Gann, "Just Intonation Explained,"

<https://www.kylegann.com/tuning.html>

But the greater philosophical attraction lay in harmony as metaphor. He saw music as having a role in saving the world from itself. Reflecting on a particularly heavy discussion the night before with a fellow grad student whose apocalyptic forebodings exceeded even his own, he wrote, "I tried to convince him that philosophies (or music or the arts) that raise the consciousness to be all inclusive (thus creating a spirit of collectivity) are as important to change and [to preventing authoritarian] control of technology as either direct confrontation or practical centralization."

That was his answer to discord and despoilment: harmony, a powerful experience of sublime sonic cohesion evoking the interconnectedness of all existence that the modern world denied at its peril. He saw just intonation, with its primacy of harmony, as uniquely suited to this task.

In time, he pursued this idealistic agenda less through works for orchestra and more through vocal music for one to four voices. Indigenous worldviews still inspired some narratives, but instead of depicting the dawn of creation, texts looked inward at the individual's odyssey from ego to awareness, the feeling becoming less sonorous and resonant and more tumultuous and sensuous. The shift was partly an artistic choice; he was a tenor and loved to sing. In and around New York through the 1980s and 1990s he performed with mezzo soprano Barbara Hess, soprano Christine Marstrand and others. But partly it was pragmatic. Besides the usual challenge of getting performances of works for large ensembles, musicians and conductors had to be willing and able to pull off the unconventional tuning.<sup>19</sup>

What did not change was the consciousness-raising. Text and music continued to grapple with one manifestation of existential duality or another — humanity vs. nature, threat vs. embrace, individual consciousness vs. universal awareness. Exploring these ideas musically called for a structure tailor-made for maximum consonance with space for dissonance.

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<sup>19</sup> Composer and critic Kyle Gann observed: "[N]othing in my profession could be more Quixotic, more masochistic, than writing an alternate-tuning orchestra piece. I once heard a very well-intentioned, nobly rehearsed performance of Ben Johnston's *J1* Symphony, and the out-of-tuneness was pitiful." November 6, 2003, [yahootuninggroupsultimatebackup.github.io](http://yahootuninggroupsultimatebackup.github.io)

## A Sui Generis Project

"In the pioneer land, the United States, an artist has got to find his own 'thing' — an unmistakable idea which delineates a personal profile."

— critic Jan Jacoby<sup>20</sup>

Just tuning was also agreeably anti-establishment. Adopting it as his sole composing language was a way of asserting a clean break with not only the whole Western tuning regime but also the avant-garde, formidably represented at Buffalo by Morton Feldman.<sup>21</sup>



Morton Feldman

In his first semester, Paul Gallagher stayed out of the fray over the postwar love affair with indeterminacy,<sup>22</sup> deeming it possibly "the most profound philosophical concept to surface through art in the 20th century" yet feeling its insights were

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<sup>20</sup> Jan Jacoby, "Meditative Beauty," *Politiken*, review of "Nierika" and "Just Piano," Paul Gallagher, composer, Erik Skjoldan, piano, Danish Young Composers Concert, Copenhagen, November 20, 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Gallagher characterized his studies with Feldman as valuable but intense. Ivar Frounberg wryly recalled the atmosphere: "Feldman had just begun teaching groups, and as newcomers, Mark Turner and I were allocated the early morning slot along with Charles Ames and Paul Gallagher. The first lesson consisted of a tough Feldmanesque monologue, in which he critiqued European culture in particular. "There is no culture in Europe," he said. "Name a few European painters who compare with Jackson Pollock, Frank Stella and Mark Rothko." Mark gave it a first shot, but was arrogantly rejected. I protested on the grounds that the Albright Knox Gallery, an art museum that Feldman really appreciated, had an Asger Jorn painting. This he completely ignored. You were not supposed to correct the maestro. At some later stage, Mark was told off because he contradicted Feldman during a lesson. Feldman leaned in close to him, allowing his bad cigarette-breath to add extra emphasis to his words: "I'll tell you one thing, Mark. It is I, ME, MYSELF, who decides who the good composers are, and not you."

<https://www.cnvill.net/mffrounberg.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> For a brief discussion of indeterminacy in music, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indeterminacy\\_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indeterminacy_(music))

overstated: "Randomness is simply control of a different order." Better to remain open to both chance and control and compose within that tension.

One year later he was ready to discard modernist tenets and stake out a position all his own. A classmate, Canadian composer Christos Hatzis, recalled a seminal conversation:

"One day in the fall of 1978 in a conversation with two colleagues and friends at SUNY, Charles Ames and Paul Gallagher, we talked about the possibility of the overtone series as the basis for a complete compositional language, not just [for] harmonies and timbres. At a time when everyone was just about jaded with endless talk of 'indeterminacy,' which was the buzzword around SUNY, the three of us got very excited with the prospect of hierarchical structures based on acoustical properties and each started exploring this idea in a different direction."<sup>23</sup>

Instead of leaving things to chance, here was a way to remain genuine yet exercise complete creative agency. Control did not have to mean the arbitrary act of an individual closed off to possibilities that lie outside of ordinary awareness. It was not necessary to refrain from making aesthetic judgments about random phenomena in order to be an open channel for the subtle patterns of the universe to reveal themselves. One could tap the immutable physics of the overtone, or harmonic, series and incorporate these naturally occurring patterns into all the elements of the composition for a completely new way of composing.

"It felt like we had made a great discovery," Hatzis recalled. "We hadn't."



Christos Hatzis



Credit: Ostrava Center for New Music, Martin Popelar

Charles Ames

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<sup>23</sup> Christos Hatzis, "Resonance," 2020, <https://www.scribd.com/document/541021147/Resonance-2020-02-21>

The three excited students in the bar did not realize that others were utilizing the basic concept, Hatzis noted in a separate paper.<sup>24</sup> "It was not a new idea and there were several modernist composers, including Karlheinz Stockhausen and James Tenney, who had paid close attention to this principle: Stockhausen briefly with his vocal work 'Stimmung' and Tenney more extensively in a number of his experimental compositions. But these composers were mainly known for their interest in experimenting with dissonant sonic materials and developing organizational systems for these materials."



<https://digital.lib.buffalo.edu/items/show/20187>

© Irene Haupt

Performance of "Stimmung" by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Buffalo NY, 1980. l-r: Paul Gallagher, Christine Marstrand, Jay Anstee, Carol Ann Sirmay, John Kasprovicz, Jocelyn Alaimo.

Whether the three hit upon the idea collaboratively right then and there or one of them articulated it first is unclear.<sup>25</sup> What is known is that Paul Gallagher consistently characterized his system of basing all aspects of a composition on pitch ratios as his unique innovation. Others have subsequently claimed originality for the same or a similar approach,<sup>26</sup> though it would not have been out of character for him to have missed that. In program notes he later described having devised his system from scratch:

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<sup>24</sup> Christos Hatzis, "The Law of One," 1998, <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/Law%20of%20One/TheLawofOne.htm> He writes: "... Charles, Paul and I were three very different individuals and followed three very different tangents but all three became inflamed by the enthusiasm of a neophyte. ... Paul Gallagher, who was more in tune with New Age ideas and practices and already in contact with a niche group of just intonation practitioners, approached the subject from the perspective of alternative tuning combined with minimalist ideas. ... " In an email, Hatzis clarified that years later he had heard that Paul Gallagher had joined some unspecified just intonation groups, though I have not found evidence of such.

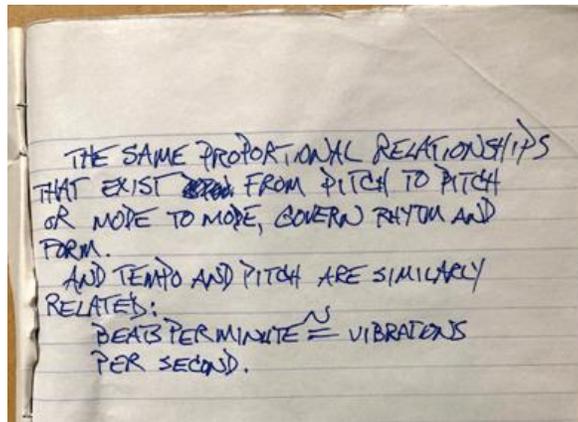
<sup>25</sup> Christos Hatzis told me via email that, beyond what he related in the papers cited above, other details of that long-ago discussion are lost to memory. I was unsuccessful in contacting Charles Ames.

<sup>26</sup> Ben Johnston, for instance, pioneered a system of patterning rhythm after harmonics. See Kyle Gann, <https://www.kylegann.com/Johnston-Keynote.html>

"From the outset it was clear to me that the quality and richness of these [just intonation] harmonies, drawn untempered from the overtone series, would demand their own language and syntax. ... I couldn't get excited about trying to graft a new harmonic language onto any existing stylistic model, so I began to develop a style that unfolds from the intervals themselves and the way they relate to each other. Rhythms, melodies, phrase structures, etc., were all derived from the same proportions as the harmonies."

It all pleasingly mirrored his message of existential harmony — that the whole and each part of existence are one and the same:

"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. 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."



Undated note.

The ink was barely dry on his Ph.D. diploma when Paul Gallagher began making a point of distancing his music from that of his iconoclast forebears. "Part of the appeal for me in working with just intonation is the opportunity to move on," he wrote. "The 20th century is almost over. What we think of as New Music is in fact getting kind of old." Having come of age to a soundtrack of civil rights ballads and anti-war rock anthems, maybe it was not so naive to believe harmony was a tonic for an ailing world. Instead of being descriptive about the bleak state of humanity, maybe it was time to be prescriptive.

In comments drafted for what turned out to be the canceled 1983 premiere of a still never performed wind symphony, "Nighthawk,"<sup>27</sup> he laid out his case:

"The composers of our time — Cage, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Feldman and Hiller, Berio, Crumb — are only holding a mirror to the world within which they live, within which we all live. ... Perhaps you've come to expect certain things from modern music: harmonic dissonance, rhythmic diffusion, and a general harshness and complexity. ... I've decided it's time for a change of heart. So in my music of the last several years, I've begun to focus on harmony, beauty and a holistic aesthetic. ... "Nighthawk" is not devoid of dissonance or confusion, so I present it to you not as my solution, but as a symbol of my search."

He likewise wasted little time, or subtlety, in differentiating himself from other just intonation composers. "I had heard pieces, for instance, where the pitches were based on Partch's system, yet every other element of the style resembled serial music," he wrote. "To me it simply sounded like Boulez being played out of tune. Yet the minimalist approach to just intonation — playing scale patterns over well-tuned drones — tended to put me to sleep"

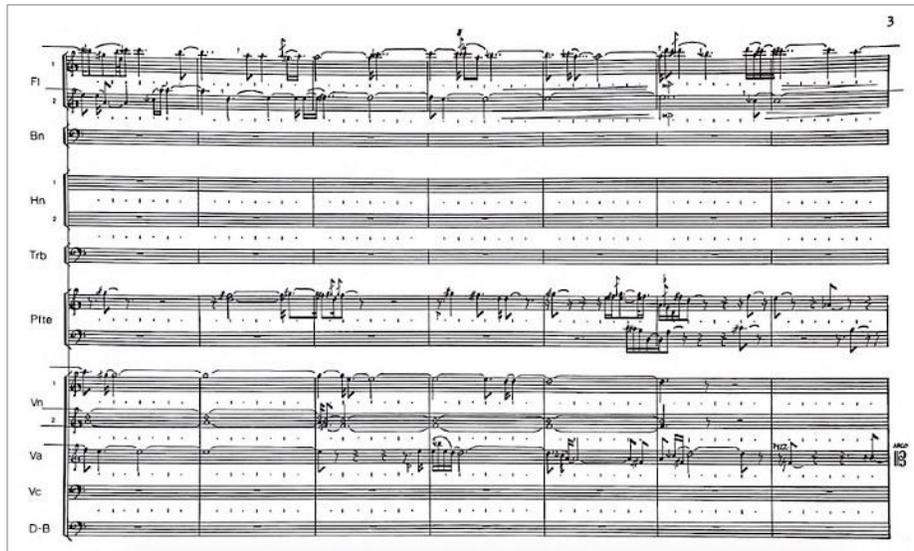
Regardless of whether or when others had arrived at a similar approach to just intonation, what mattered for him then — and what matters for just intonation now — is that in his hands his system proved to be a potent creative tool.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Gallagher, "Nighthawk," symphony in just intonation in two movements for large wind ensemble, 1983.

## An Intuitive Language

After a while, he grew fluent in this way of composing. Writing text for vocal pieces not so much — he spoke of laboring over the words so they would flow with the notes already put to paper. But the music itself tended to follow freely from the interval scheme.

A musical score for the piece "Palongawhoya" by Paul Gallagher. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Fl (Flute), Bn (Bassoon), Hn (Horn), Trb (Trumpet), Ptte (Percussion), Vn (Violin), Va (Viola), Vc (Cello), and D-B (Double Bass). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A page number "3" is visible in the top right corner of the score area.

From "Palongawhoya," Paul Gallagher.

The highly consonant effect he typically was after kept his emphasis on pitch ratios in the small whole numbers — 3:2, 4:3, 5:4. His tuning notes state: "I typically work with 19 tones to the octave, although I occasionally venture as far as 32. My primary scale is the 8th through 16th partials of an overtone series with C as the fundamental. I also work with modal variations of the primary scale built on the 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th partials of that series."

"After several years of working this way," he wrote, "the 'feel' of these relationships has sunk in to the extent that the language has a life of its own, and I'm free to be completely poetic and intuitive within its framework."

Being able to slip easily into the zone and stay there without strain was no small asset, especially for someone whose career ended up being front-loaded. Nearly all his major works were composed before 1990.

## Just Sound

Ultimately, just intonation was a sonic imperative. Nothing sounded as beguiling as the harmony produced by just tuning. He was, he said, "seduced by its exceptional beauty, clarity and cohesion." How finely the natural harmony of just intonation meshed with the meaning he was conveying was an obvious attraction for him. But had he not fallen in love with the sound, all the rest would be immaterial.

As composer and theorist Marc Sabat expresses it more straightforwardly: Just intonation is not "an ideological choice. It is simply, for me, motivated by the fact that I really want to hear these sounds."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Marc Sabat, "Introducing My Work in Microtonally Extended Just Intonation," based on a lecture at Ostrava Days 2017, Czech Republic, <https://marsbat.space/pdfs/Ostrava2017Sabat.pdf>

### III. INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS

“[W]hen we wonder if it’s cultural appropriation, the correct standard, in my judgment, is whether it diminishes, erases, or displays a privilege that corrupts its intrinsic cultural value.”

— Professor Karla FC Holloway <sup>29</sup>

Honoring indigenous conceptions of the harmony of existence as an example for the world was arguably the opposite of misappropriation. No stranger to personal ambition, Paul Gallagher nevertheless believed his music had a meaningful purpose beyond his own ego gratification. Like a lot of people engaged in creative work, he considered it the role of the artist to soak up his or her surroundings with a keen sensitivity, then pour forth with an aesthetically compelling response.



© C. Gallagher

"Moonlight on the Forest Green,"  
photointarsia collage, Paul Gallagher.

His response to the human pettiness and malevolence he saw as endangering all life on the planet was untempered harmony. He offered this musical remedy chiefly for its own sake, as a sort of aural balm, but also as an analogy for the inseparability of creation. And the place where he found the most complete expression of existential

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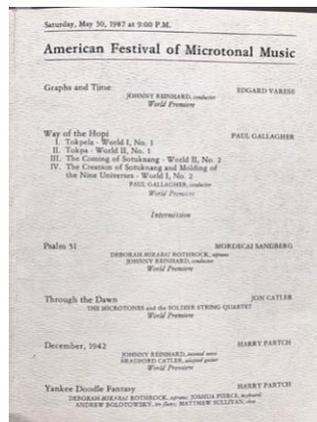
<sup>29</sup> Karla FC Holloway, James B. Duke Emerita Professor of English, African-American Studies and Professor of Law at Duke University, in an interview with Robin Kirk in "Inspiration vs. Appropriation," <https://zora.medium.com/inspiration-vs-cultural-appropriation-ff49132929e8>.  
<http://www.karlaholloway.com/>

harmony was in traditional Native American worldviews. When he drew on indigenous concepts in a handful of works, he was speaking directly to the fractious, anxious world he saw rotting away around him. "As the disastrous imbalances of contemporary Western civilization become abundantly clear," he wrote, "the voice of the Hopi people is pertinent and increasingly pervasive."

But for whatever reason, perhaps dismay at the thought that any indigenous reference could give offense, in later years he made a note to himself about stripping out all the cultural allusions in "Way of the Hopi" and renaming it simply, "New Sky."<sup>30</sup>

It raises the question: Do the indigenous titles in "Hopi" and a handful of other compositions enrich the listening experience? How significant are they to imprinting the message the composer wanted to convey? Evidently he did not regard them as integral. Which stands to reason. Except for some folk-style rounds, most of which he considered outside his serious oeuvre,<sup>31</sup> none of his works looked to indigenous culture for anything beyond titles and text.

Musically, there was no attempt to replicate or take inspiration from rhythm, melody or other aspects of indigenous music — not surprising considering his insistence on his own composing style.



American Festival of Microtonal Music,  
Merkin Hall, NYC, May 30, 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the movements in "Way of the Hopi" are rather elaborately titled. (I. Tokpela – World I, No. 1. II. Tokpa – World II, No. 1. III. The Coming of Sotuknang – World II, No. 2. IV. The Creation of Sotuknang and Molding of the Nine Universes – World I, No. 2.) Such esoteric specificity may feel out of step with current sensibilities, but at the time it presumably was intended to enhance perceptions of genuineness.

<sup>31</sup> He became resigned to the fact that many of his nonmusician friends and family members considered one of the rounds, the lovely "Close Your Sleepy Eyes," his best work. <https://www.paulgallaghermusic.com>

Besides three instrumental works with indigenous allusions — "Palongawhoya," "Way of the Hopi" and "Nierika"<sup>32</sup> — the vocal epic "Kingdom of Mescal," lushly illustrated with his original artwork, draws from Central and North American rite of passage/quest for enlightenment tradition for its text. Also inspired by indigenous tradition were rounds for accompanied and unaccompanied SATB quartet that he wrote mainly to sing informally with friends, some of which were produced on cassette.<sup>33</sup>



© C. Gallagher

"Heron," acrylic on canvas, *Round the Great Circle*, Paul Gallagher.

That he found indigenous stories dramatically absorbing was characteristic. Stories in general were a thing for him. Later he explored operatic forms and sketched ideas for a live multimedia theater.

What is perhaps surprising is how much 20th century Western contemporary classical music, including microtonal music, does draw on Native American music, some of it incorporating indigenous musical elements.<sup>34</sup> Typically these composers

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<sup>32</sup> "Nierika" for solo piano premiered in New York in 1988 with Erik Skjoldan performing. No recording is known to exist.

<sup>33</sup> *Round the Great Circle*, Heron Consort, words and music by Paul Gallagher, cassette, 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Examples include Gloria Coates's "Indian Sounds," 1991, for voices and chamber orchestra and texts drawn from Seneca, Winnebago and Plains Indians songs.

See also: Katherine Hoover's "Kokopeli" for solo flute, named for the flute-playing Hopi deity. In a program note quoted in her *New York Times* obituary, she said, "In this piece I have tried to capture some of this sense of spaciousness, and of the Hopi's deep kinship with this land."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/obituaries/katherine-hoover-dead.html>

See also: Kyle Gann's "Snake Dance No. 3," about which he writes: "With apologies to the Hopi Indians, who actually dance while holding live snakes, the snake dance is a genre I invented for myself in 1991. The basic idea was inspired (like so many American rhythmic ideas) by Henry Cowell's book *New Musical Resources*, which suggests composing within a scale of tempos analogous to a pitch scale. Fusing that with the gear-shifting rhythm of Hopi, Zuni, and Pueblo music, I came up with a conception of a percussion dance in which the tempo moves back and forth along a series of steps corresponding to notated durations: 8th-note, triplet quarter, dotted 8th,

had their "American Indian" period and moved on. Paul Gallagher also moved on, but time proved short, and his Native American-titled works ended up being among his most important. He would no doubt have found it ironic that the ensembles and presenters most receptive to programming alternatively tuned music might also be more likely to dismiss his indigenously themed work out of hand.

In the end, their nomenclature notwithstanding, "Hopi," "Palongawhoya" and the rest were fundamentally about demonstrating what just intonation in his hands could sound like. In that sense, the ultimate basis for the regard in which they are held today is simply their sheer compositional artistry — the music itself.

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quarter, quarter-tied-to-a-16th, and so on. The motion reminds me of the back-and-forth movement of a snake." <https://kylegann.com/SnakeDance3.html>

For an early 20th century depiction of the Hopi creation story, see: Frederick Shepherd Converse, "Bright Angel Trail" from American Sketches, 1933.

For a full survey, see: Michael V. Pisani, "A Chronological Listing of Musical Works on American Indian Subjects, Composed Since 1608," Vassar College, 2006, <http://indianmusiclist.vassar.edu/>

#### IV. HIS PLACE IN THE REPERTOIRE



The musical message Paul Gallagher left to the world seems to speak uncannily to our time. Open conflict is ascendant. The planet and those who inhabit it seem at war with each other. And what of music? Is tuning meaningful for today?

Before this legacy of harmony can have something to say to the world now may first depend on down-to-earth factors:

- Arranging performances. What festivals and ensembles will program the music?
- Releasing an album of the instrumental works, especially the never-heard ones. What will that take?
- Unlocking more old recordings that may hold more great music.
- And what of the scores for which no recordings exist?

By itself, preservation will not ensure this music's place in the just intonation repertoire. That will be up to others — presenters, festival organizers, microtonal groups, ensembles — to make happen.



Paul Gallagher (1953–2011)

Paul Gallagher believed that music had power. The sound *was* the message. His sound continues to feel ageless. Anyway, he did not believe in time. He saw himself as existing outside it, and through his music, he does.