

Distinguished Lecturers in Music Theory Series

Berio's Compositional Poetics as Performance**Dr. Orit Hilewicz**Assistant Professor of Music Theory
Indiana University

Tuesday, March 14th, 2023

12:45 PM

103 Music Practice Building

Free and Open to the Public

**Lecture Abstract**

One of the first examples in Umberto Eco's "The Poetics of the Open Work" is Luciano Berio's *Sequenza* no. 1 for solo flute (1958), which became one of Eco's exemplars for *opera aperta* (open work), a category of musical and literary works that present an especially broad field of interpretive possibilities to performers, listeners, and readers. However, in 1992 Berio composed a "closed" version of the *Sequenza* using traditional notation, limiting the freedoms that this work allows performers. A few years before revising the *Sequenza*, Berio said in an interview that he hopes "to rewrite *Sequenza* I in rhythmic notation: maybe it will be less 'open' and more authoritarian, but at least it will be reliable. And I hope that Umberto Eco will forgive me..." (1985). In this paper I examine two little-known works by Berio, *Continuo* for Orchestra and *Ekphrasis* (*Continuo* II), published in 1989–91 and 1996 respectively, which show that the open work—albeit an altered and uniquely musical version of the concept—is a useful context for understanding Berio's compositional poetics. While scholars (including Eco) tend to associate musical open works with certain performative freedoms, *Ekphrasis* transforms *Continuo* from a singular "closed" expression into one of multiple perspectives on *Continuo*'s musical idea, which the composer likens to a structure that is "open at any one time for alternative extensions by added new wings, rooms and windows" (1996). Drawing from archival research, I argue that Berio assumes both roles of composer and performer and creates multiple fully-composed pieces, which I call "composed performances," each providing a different realization of an abstract musical object. In the subtlety of its differences from *Continuo*, *Ekphrasis*, perhaps more than any other of his works, directs listeners' attention to the creative impetus at the core of Berio's musical practice.

Bio

Orit Hilewicz is an assistant professor of music theory at the Jacobs School of Music in Indiana University. In 2017, she completed her PhD at Columbia University in New York. Her work concentrates on intertextuality, metaphor, and agency in music of the long twentieth century. Her articles on this subject, which have been published in *Music Theory Online* and *Perspectives of New Music*, among other journals, propose strategies for listening, observing, and analyzing visual and literary approaches to musical structures in concert and film music. She has served as co-editor of *Theory and Practice* and assistant editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, and she is currently on the editorial boards of the *Music Theory Spectrum* and *Perspectives of New Music*.

Dr. Hilewicz will also guest-teach the following courses:

1. MUS 978 (Graduate Analysis of Contemporary Music)

Tuesday, March 14th at 4:10 PM – 6:00 PM

245 Music Practice Building

Contact Dr. Cara Stroud (cstroud@msu.edu) if you are interested in attending.**2. MUS 974 (Graduate Proseminar in Post-Tonal Music Theory and Analysis)**

Thursday, March 16th at 4:10 PM – 6:00 PM

241 Music Practice Building

Contact Dr. James Sullivan (sulli628@msu.edu) if you are interested in attending.