Leonard B. Meyer, 1918-2007

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Leonard B. Meyer, 89, Emeritus Benjamin Franklin Professor of Music and the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, died of lung cancer at his Manhattan home on December 30. A native New Yorker, Professor Meyer was famous for the breadth of his research and the depth of his intellect.

An unapologetic empiricist and intellectual pluralist, he published six books and numerous essays over a long career. These dealt with such diverse areas as musical emotion, the psychology of music, music analysis and theory, aesthetics, information theory, contemporary music, criticism, anthropology of art, twentieth-century cultural history, style change, and the nature of science versus the study of the humanities.

Professor Meyer came from a cultured family in Scarsdale, N.Y. He studied violin seriously as a child and avidly collected plants, rocks, and fossils (the family basement became something of a museum). Matriculating to Columbia University in 1938, he majored in philosophy, studied music, and developed a strong interest in the humanities. In his senior year he also began taking private composition lessons with Stefan Wolpe.

Following graduation in 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and participated in a number of major engagements (the Battle of the Bulge, the Battle of Hurtgin Forest, the liberation of Colmar and that of Paris). After completing this tour as a Second Lieutenant, he married Lee Malakoff with whom he was to father three children.

After the war he returned to Columbia to resume his music studies and to earn an M.A. in composition under the tutelage of Otto Luening. Subsequently, he worked with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood, who in 1946 helped him secure a position at the University of Chicago.

This proved to be a crucial turning point in his career: the Chicago experience rekindled his scholarly interests in the humanities, and after 1950 his interest in composing waned. Subsequently, he enrolled in the Ph.D. program administered by the Committee on the History of Culture, which allowed him to investigate music theory, aesthetics, and psychology while still fulfilling his duties as a faculty member.

His published dissertation, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956), was a landmark because of its invocation of Gestalt principles in the analysis of musical affect. Praised by Winthrop Sargeant in *The New Yorker* magazine, the book remains in print and is widely referenced in emotion studies even today.

Two more books followed in close succession—the *Rhythmic Structure of Music* (1960, with Grosvenor Cooper), which is still widely cited, and *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (1967). The latter was notable in that it predicted that no dominant style would emerge in modern music and that contemporary culture would come to be characterized by a stasis of diverse multiplicity, a prognosis that remains operative to this day.

Shortly before his fourth book in 1973 (*Explaining Music*, based on his Ernest Bloch lectures at the University of California at Berkeley), Meyer was named Phyllis Fay Horton Professor at the University of Chicago. As a result of his recruitment efforts during a nine-year chairmanship, the Department of Music achieved a high national ranking. Professor Meyer was also instrumental in securing major funding for the Chicago Contemporary Players, whose programs and performances of modern and experimental music became a national model.

In 1975 he accepted an appointment as Benjamin Franklin Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and married the musicologist Janet Levy, who predeceased him in 2004. He collaborated on experiments with psychologists, was a founding member of the associate board of *Music Perception*, and edited a series of books on music theory and criticism published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Remaining on the Penn faculty until his retirement (1988), he brought out two more books, a major tome on style (1989) and a book of collected essays (2000).

Professor Meyer lectured widely at home and abroad. His expertise in so many disciplines led to public honors from the American Musicological Society, the Society for Music Theory, and the Society for Music Perception and Cognition.

An inveterate reader and regular subscriber to *Science*, he perused many fields outside the domain of music. Tragically, late in life, he developed macular degeneration...
in both eyes and gradually lost his ability to see and thus to write.

Nevertheless, he remained intellectually active. He closely followed the contemporary music scene by listening to the radio and was an opera and concert enthusiast. He could sing Gilbert and Sullivan by heart, quote Shakespeare for any occasion, and was known by his friends for his witty repartee and sly puns. He was, in short, a man in full.

He is survived by his sister Carolyn Meyer of New York, three daughters (Muffie Meyer, a producer and director of PBS and other documentaries; Carlin Meyer, a professor at the New York School of Law; and Erica Meyer, a former advertising executive, in Chicago), and two grandchildren, Emma Blumer and Molly Jacobs-Meyer.

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