

More About SEXTUPLETS

One of the most important trends in 20th Century music was pitch serialism, sometimes called “dodecaphony,” but best known as the 12-tone system. To very briefly summarize a really complicated compositional procedure, 12-tone music tries to do away with any hint of tonality by basing its music on “tone rows” or “sets.” A set is all 12 notes of the chromatic scale, in any order, so long as none is repeated. The composition is then created using various permutations of the basic set. Musical serialism can also be applied to other elements, such as rhythm and dynamics, but the 12-tone system is most common and best known.

12-tone music, which first appeared in the 1920s, grew to prominence in the 1930s with the compositions of Arnold Schoenberg and his followers Alban Berg and Anton Webern, sometimes called the “New (or Second) Viennese School.” They were followed by such composers as Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, and Milton Babbitt, who specialized in the system and took it to the next level. A few important mainstream composers, such as Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland, also experimented with serialism late in their careers.

Sextuplets dates from my early days, circa 1970, when I was searching for my “voice” and experimenting with various styles. It is unique in my work because I ultimately did not choose to pursue serialism, and this is my only surviving composition done in the 12-tone system. It consists of six untitled miniatures all based on the 12-tone set G-C#-B-F-E-A#-D#-F#-C-D-A-G#.

I once sent a few of my compositions, including this one, to one of my favorite composers for evaluation and received this verdict:

“**Sextuplets** is a meaningful and expressive work with a natural flow.”

– Vincent Persichetti