

Robert Russell Bennett
Chamber Music



**Five Improvisations
On Exotic Scales**

for Flute, Cello, and Piano

(1947)

for the Sagul Trio

Janet Schlein Somers and Paul Mack Somers, editors



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Improvisations was composed for the Sagul Trio (Edith Sagul, flute; Maryjane Thomas, 'cello; Geraldine Winnett, piano), which premiered music by several mid-20th century composers. It was played by them on 14 February at Town Hall, New York City, as part of radio station WNYC's 1947 American Music Festival.

The use of non-diatonic scales was probably rooted in Bennett's study of the Greek modes with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) twenty years earlier. Each movement is preceded by an intonation or statement of its "exotic" scale.

1. "Balinese", though it uses the exotic scale played before the full movement, the genius of the piece is in how it captures the rhythmic energy of Balinese gamelan music.
2. "Ancient Chinese" uses a pentatonic scale, which is best heard by playing only the black keys of a piano. It is widely used in many folk musics around the world, but is most associated to western ears with the music of China.
3. "Ancient Greek Hypophrygian" makes no attempt to "sound ancient Greek" but is quite evocative of modern Greek folk dance rhythms and sounds. There are several different scales called Hypophrygian. The one Bennett uses is F, G, A, B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F.
4. "Negroid Blue" is written in a blues scale: C, D-sharp, E, F, G, A, B-flat, C. Bennett had orchestrated Jerome Kern's *Showboat*, which includes "Old Man River" with its evocation of hard labor. So Bennett's tempo marking here – "Very tired" – should never be confused with the racial stereotype "lazy".
5. "Chromatic Bugle" reflects the practice of using bugles of different pitches, each with one key to lower the pitch $\frac{1}{2}$ step. This piece imagines a series of bugles each built a step higher than another, each able to play a half-step lower because of its one key being pressed.

Robert Russell Bennett (1894-1981) led — for some seven decades — an active professional life, both as orchestrator of others' music and as composer of a long list of concert works. He is reputed to have orchestrated all or part of some 300 Broadway and London productions between 1920 and 1976, and turned out hundreds of other published arrangements during his lifetime...

Spending the duration of his professional career almost entirely in New York City, Bennett made his acquaintance with those on both 'sides' of the music business: [Jerome] Kern and [George] Gershwin on one hand, and [Sergei] Rachmaninoff, [Leopold] Stokowski, and [Fritz] Reiner on the other. The great majority of his pieces were given New York premieres in the hands of prominent conductors, orchestras, and soloists.

Bennett made it clear to Kern and other songwriters that his personal preferences in music lay with the classics; though he was viewed as something of a 'snob' by his Broadway associates for this reason, he saw the popular music industry as merely a money-making venture, with popular songs just another commercial commodity. This did not prevent him, however, from establishing a reputation for tastefulness, creativity, and restraint in his commercial scoring; for several decades he was acknowledged as the leading practitioner in his field. —George J. Ferencz. *Robert Russell Bennett, a Bio-Bibliography*. Greenwood Press, 1990. p. ix.

The Maurice River Press Robert Russell Bennett Project

This series is devoted to Bennett's unpublished works, undertaken with the permission of his estate, administered by his grandson, Kean MacDonald. We are grateful for the always supportive and cheerfully given aid of the Bennett scholar George Ferencz of the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, and to the music librarian Gregory MacAyeal of the Music Library at Northwestern University, who at all times carefully and expertly aided in the procuring of the various Bennett manuscripts, some from the 1920s needing restoration before being turned over to us.

The Editors

Janet Schlein Somers graduated with a Bachelors in Music performance (ute) from San Francisco State University and with a Masters in Library Science from California State University at Berkeley. She subsequently was a music cataloger at Cornell University's Olin Library, was the head cataloger at the Juilliard School, consultant in setting up the music library at the Hebrew Arts School of the Kaufman Center in New York, and Luce Cataloger at the Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton. She also earned a M.A. in Music from Montclair State University in New Jersey. For many years she was a freelance utist in North Jersey. She now plays with the Bay Atlantic Symphony.

Paul Mack Somers (b. 1942) studied composition with Warren Benson and George Andrix at Ithaca College Conservatory, and participated in master classes with Norman Dello Joio under a Ford Foundation Grant. Somers has composed theatric, vocal, choral, chamber, and orchestral music. His music has been performed in Lincoln Center, Weill Hall in Carnegie Hall, and Ars Vitalis.

Commissioners include Palisades Virtuosi, Brett Deubner, Ellen Hassman, Ron Levy, Michiko Otaki, and the Jacques Cousteau Center for Estuarine Research for a young audience work related to the ecology of the Delaware Bay. He has also composed various solo instrumental works over the years, available on the CD "Sonatas and More" by Maurice River Press (MRP1502). He and his wife Janet live along the Maurice River near Mauricetown, New Jersey.

Five Improvisations on Exotic Scales

for Flute, Violoncello, and Piano

Duration: c. 14'

ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT
(1894-1981)
*Edited by Janet S. Somers
and Paul M. Somers*

I. (Balinese)

Quiet and deliberate **Gay (♩ = 132)**

Flute

Violoncello

Piano

Ped.

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

Ped.

10

Fl. *fp* **A**

Vc. *fp* **A**

Pno. *fp* **A**

Ped. Ped.

16

Fl. *sfz*

Vc. *sfz*

Pno. *f*

22

Fl. *f stacc. e marcato* **B**

Vc. arco *f stacc. e marcato* **B**

Pno. *f* **B**

27

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

32

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

not too loud

mp

C

37

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

fp

f

mf

II. (Ancient Chinese)

Soft, slow and misty ($\text{♩} = 50$)

Flute

Violoncello

Piano

p very delicate

pp

Ped. _____

(una corda)

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

5

con sord.

pp

10 Still slow (♩ = ♩) **A**

Fl. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Pno. *ppp* 1 2 3 4 5

8va-

15

Fl.

Vc.

Pno. 6 7 8 9 10

8va-

20 **B**

Fl.

Vc.

Pno. 11 12 13 14

8va-

ppp sempre

B *loco*

III. (Ancient Greek - Hypophrygian)

Cheerful (♩ = 100)

Flute

Violoncello

senza sord.

Piano

Cheerful (♩ = 100)

p

(tre corde)

5

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

mp

3

10

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

mp

A

15

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

IV. (Negroid Blue)

Very tired (♩ = 54)

Musical score for Flute, Violoncello, and Piano. The Flute part begins with a *p* dynamic and a sixteenth-note triplet. The Violoncello part starts with a *p* dynamic and a half note. The Piano part features a *pp* dynamic and a half note. The tempo is marked as 'Very tired' with a quarter note equal to 54 beats per minute. The score includes a double bar line and a 4/4 time signature change.

Musical score for Flute, Violoncello, and Piano. The Flute part has a triplet of eighth notes. The Violoncello part has a melodic line with slurs and ties. The Piano part has a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and ties. The score is in 4/4 time.

7

Fl. *p* 3 **A**

Vc.

Pno. **A**

10

Fl. 3

Vc.

Pno.

14

Fl.

Vc.

Pno.

V. (Chromatic Bugles)

Tempo di marcia (♩ = 120)

The musical score is written for three instruments: Flute, Violoncello, and Piano. It is in 4/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system features the Flute and Violoncello parts. The Flute part has a whole rest. The Violoncello part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a series of eighth-note triplets. The first triplet is marked *ad lib.*, followed by an *accel.* section, and then a *rall.* section. The Flute part has a whole rest in the second system. The Piano part has a whole rest in the first system and begins in the second system with a piano (*p*) dynamic, playing a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

4

Fl.

Vc.

mf

Pno.

15ma

7

Fl.

Vc.

sempre stacc.

Pno.

15ma

10

Fl.

Vc.

A

Pno.

A 15ma