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Hearing Voices in Santa Fe:
The Sonic Implications of Possession in *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* and *The Devils of Loudun*

In the summer of 1969, Santa Fe Opera packed one August weekend with two contrasting American premieres: first Krzysztof Penderecki's *The Devils of Loudun* and then Gian Carlo Menotti's *Help! Help! The Globolinks!*¹ The first, a tortured account of a demon-possessed nun whose testimony led to the gruesome execution of a priest, was written by one of the young darlings of the Eastern European avant-garde, and the second was a fantastic children's opera written by a noted critic of the avant-garde establishment. On first glance, it seems that these two operas could not be more different. Both works are, however, linked by the central metaphor of possession and by their inability to resolve the crisis that arises out of that possession. While Penderecki and Menotti use music to dramatize the displacement of one subject's voice by another, disembodied (dis-en-subjected?) voice, they are ultimately unsuccessful in reasserting a clear return to order. In both cases, then, the audience must deal with the implications of these operatic subjects whose relationship to their own voice(s) has been thoroughly compromised. Audiences and critics—and especially those who heard both operas on that first weekend in Santa Fe—had strong responses, noting feelings of horror and amusement, disgust and wonder. In comparing the two works and

¹ Both of these operas had premiered in Hamburg: Menotti's in 1968, Penderecki's just a few months earlier in 1969. Penderecki's *Devils of Loudun* had a performance in Stuttgart a few days after the Hamburg premiere; the Santa Fe performance was its third staging (and, significantly, it was Penderecki's first major revision, as he responded to criticisms that had followed the German premieres.

After their Hamburg premieres, versions of those two stagings were filmed for television broadcast in Germany. These two filmed recordings are now the most readily available performances of these operas, and I will use them to illustrate my musical discussion here, despite differences in language and production between these and the Santa Fe performances.

Krzysztof Penderecki, *Die Teufel von Loudun*; DVD recording (Arthaus Musik, 2007; originally filmed in 1969).

Gian Carlo Menotti, *Help! Help! The Globolinks*; DVD recording (Arthaus Musik, 2007; originally filmed in 1968).

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their critical reception, I argue that possession functioned as a metaphor for a larger crisis within modern music and, indeed, within modernity itself: this was a crisis of meaning, of communication, of subjective stability. This sonic crisis of possession extended beyond these two operas, reverberating outwards into a whole host of films and other sounding media, allowing artists and audiences to experiment with, and to experience vicariously, the implications of a body with multiple voices, or a voice floating free without its body.

Krzysztof Penderecki, fresh off his international success with *The Passion according to St. Luke* (1966), wrote his first opera *The Devils of Loudun* (1969) for a commission from Hamburg Opera. In constructing his libretto, the young composer turned to the 1952 documentary novel by Aldous Huxley and the 1961 play by John Whiting as source material.² Both of these earlier texts narrated the seventeenth-century encounter between two historical figures: Father Urbain Grandier (1590-1634) and Sister Jeanne of the Angels (1602-1665). Father Grandier served as a priest in Loudun, where he built quite a scandalous reputation as a seducer of local women and (perhaps more ruinously) as a critic of Cardinal Richelieu's centralizing political tactics. Jeanne, the abbess of the local Ursuline convent, learned about the priest's scandalous reputation and she accused him of causing her (and her fellow nuns) to be possessed by devils. In light of Grandier's aforementioned political and sexual infelicities, state and religious leaders were more than happy to run with this accusation of witchcraft, and they burned Grandier at the stake in 1634.

In both Huxley's book and Whiting's play, the demoniac Jeanne appears as a figure who is simultaneously pitiable and dangerous. She is torn by twin impulses, to seduce and to destroy Grandier, and in the sway of this torment she convinces herself that she has been possessed. Even

² Polish music critic Ludwik Erhardt reported that Penderecki had asked him to collaborate on a libretto for the opera, but eventually he constructed it himself "with the help of scissors and glue" (cutting and rearranging the German translation of Whiting's play). Ludwik Erhardt, "Konkurs na libretto," *Dialog* 13, no. 12 (December 1968): 60-63.

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for Huxley, famously attracted to the possibilities of paranormal and mystical experience, there could be no real question that Jeanne's possession experience was genuine:

She had begun by deliberately indulging in the imagination with . . . the unknown but titillatingly notorious M. Grandier. But in time deliberate and occasional indulgence turned into irresistible addiction. . . . [And] during the exorcisms she was no longer a subject; she was only an object with intense sensations. It was horrible, but it was also wonderful—an outrage but at the same time a revelation and, in the literal sense of the word, an ecstasy, a standing outside of the odious and all too familiar self.³

Within Huxley's narrative, therefore, Jeanne is not in control of herself. She has not been possessed, but she has been repressed, and this repression has reduced her to what Julia Kristeva has described in *The Power of Horror* as "the abject"—Jeanne is the "place where meaning collapses," the uncanny spectacle of "brutish suffering."⁴ Throughout the spectacle of her possession and her exorcisms, it is the inescapable horror of her bodily functions and excretions—her tears, her vomit, her blood, her shit—that reveals her inability to maintain a stable subject position and to "respect borders, positions, rules."⁵ Film theorist Barbara Creed has argued that the specter of abjection, often figured as the Monstrous Feminine, is a key device in horror film: the abject female body threatens patriarchal systems of reason and signification, but this threat is inevitably and cathartically defeated. The abject Monstrous Feminine therefore re-inscribes the authority and stability of the (male) symbolic order.⁶ In Huxley's book, that re-inscription occurs when the exorcist Father Surin finally succeeds in removing Jeanne's affliction (although the demons subsequently pass into him); in Whiting's play, a different kind of stabilization occurs when Jeanne admits in the third act that she had been participating in a deliberate act of dissimulation. She had been faking all along.⁷

³ Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (New York: Harper Perennial Classics, 2009; first published by Harper & Brothers, 1952), 114-116.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; originally published 1982), 1-2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁷ John Whiting, *The Devils* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962; first published in 1961).

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While Penderecki's libretto is very closely related to these source materials, the music performs a different kind of work, clouding the question of Jeanne's possession (is it real? Is it fake?) considerably. Here I will discuss two different ways that Penderecki's musical choices undercut any certainty that Jeanne might be faking, consciously or otherwise. First: at the key moments of possession, when the exorcists call on Jeanne's indwelling demons to declare themselves, we first hear Jeanne laugh in a rapidly rising contour and then answer in her characteristic disjunct vocal line (rising and falling minor ninths), capped with an exclamation at the "highest possible note" in her range (Example 1; <https://youtu.be/N-zPEq48Sxg?t=1718>). Penderecki is here exploring the grain of Jeanne's voice, and we are meant to recognize her. In the next moment, however, when her voice suddenly jumps to the bass clef, notated as a *basso profundo*, our faith is shaken. This voice introduces an irreducible problem: Jeanne sings in an impossible voice, a man's voice, a voice that could not have been produced by her body. This presents a jarring cognitive dissonance—and one that is gone before it can even be processed, for, in the next breath, Jeanne sings once again in her own soprano range in a series of rising ninths.

The musical score is a complex orchestral and vocal arrangement. It features several parts:

- tp** (trumpet): Starts with a dynamic marking of *p*.
- cl** (clarinet): Dynamic marking of *f*.
- tn** (trombone): Dynamic marking of *mf*.
- vc** (cello): Dynamic marking of *f*.
- vb** (double bass): Dynamic marking of *f*.
- Jeanne**: Vocal part with lyrics in English and German. Includes a circled number '63'.
- Barré**: Vocal part with lyrics in English and German.
- fl** (flute): Part with complex rhythmic patterns.
- cht s** (chamber horn): Part with complex rhythmic patterns.

 The score includes various performance instructions such as 'arco', 'pizz.', and 'sf'. It also contains detailed lyrics in both English and German, such as '(Silence. He turns to the others.)' and 'They never answer at once afraid of committing themselves.'

Example 1: Krzysztof Penderecki, *The Devils of Loudun* Act 1, Scene 13 (*Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne* and Schott, 1969)

At other moments in the opera, Penderecki continues to introduce impossible voices doing impossible things. For instance, in Act 2, Scene 9, he requires Jeanne to produce, simultaneously, the highest and lowest notes possible (using his characteristic triangle notation)—a dual sonority that

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would be physically impossible for any single human singer to produce.⁸ Also, at the end of Act 2, after Jeanne and her colleagues have supposedly been exposed as over-sexed frauds in the public exorcism in the town square, Penderecki isolates Jeanne on stage. She is no longer performing for anyone, yet in the silence of her own mind, the voice is there. Thus, even in the privacy of her own self, there is no longer a clear distinction between her own voice and that of the demon(s); the character we know as Jeanne has become a multivocal body. (<https://youtu.be/N-zPEq48Sxg?t=3992>)

Penderecki further emphasizes Jeanne's multivocality in a second layer of musical decisions: he employs a chorus alongside his large orchestral forces, and over the course of the opera, it becomes ever clearer that these voices are connected to Jeanne's interior reality. From the first pages of the opera, as Jeanne sits alone in her cell praying (and masturbating to fantasies of Grandier), the choral forces build in density and volume as she moves towards climax. The audience is therefore faced, from the very beginning, with some important questions: where are those voices coming from? Are they part of the non-diegetic score, or are they...coming from Jeanne herself? The syncing between the many voices and Jeanne's interior subject is even more evident once she begins to manifest her possession. At the end of the scene described above (Act 1, Scene 13, the first scene in which Jeanne speaks with another voice), a chorus of women joins her to name Grandier as the instigator of the possession (Example 2):

⁸ Note that Penderecki does not give any instruction in his score about *how* these moments should be handled in production. Typically, an off-stage male performer sings the lower notes, but there are many other options. It seems that Stuttgart in 1969 employed some electronics to accomplish this effect, but I do not at this time have further information about that (or about the way that Santa Fe Opera realized these moments).

Example 2: Krzysztof Penderecki, *The Devils of Loudun* Act 1, Scene 13 (end) (*Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne* and Schott, 1969)

It is possible to read this group of women as a chorus of nuns who have been “infected” by Jeanne’s possession. In fact, Penderecki’s employ of long, indeterminate squiggly shapes derived from his own study of encephalograms at a mental health institution in Poland resonates with this metaphor

DRAFT: Please do not distribute, duplicate, or cite this material without permission of the author of illness.⁹ But at another key moments of the opera, the choral voices rage desperately (together with the orchestral forces), indicating that the boundary between Jeanne's subject and that of the indwelling voices has deteriorated. As Jeanne loses her own agency at the hands of both State and Church authorities, her demoniac voices—the multivocal forces that emanate from her being—take on a life of their own. The power of these voices is made manifest at the conclusion of the opera, as Father Grandier burns to death on a blazing pyre. Jeanne stands by and watches, silently, but the orchestral and choral forces build around her to their densest (yet static, immoveable, irreversible) texture yet. I would argue that, in this moment, there is a sense in which Grandier has been executed not by the State or the Church, but by Jeanne. These voices produce a force that resonates beyond Jeanne's own subjective bounds and that has the potential to possess all who behold its power.

By contrast, both the music and the narrative of Gian Carlo Menotti's *Help! Help! The Globalinks!* (1968) are much simpler than Penderecki's *Devils*, but the role of possession (or, more specifically, of alien-abduction-as-possession) is worth explicating here. In 1968, the Italian-American Menotti was in a very different position than that of the young avant-gardist, Penderecki: he was in his late 50s and had long been known as a composer who wrote accessible, popular music grounded in a compositional idiom that seemed, perhaps, to belong to an earlier point on the chronological timeline. His contemporary compositional voice embraced the tradition of the Western canon in a manner that was deeply suspicious among Western artists and intellectuals during the Cold War. The same impulse that led to Penderecki's embrace as an exemplar of Eastern European avant-gardism (anti-socialist realism) also led to the derision of figures such as Menotti. Martin Bernheimer, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, recounted that

Menotti is ensconced in respectable middle age and looks back on a successful career that has elicited more applause from the masses than from the so-called intellectual

⁹ Penderecki's use of encephalograms as inspiration for musical lines is well documented; what is less clear to me is the question of consent (specifically: the consent of the patients whose scans were collected and used as pitch notation in pieces such as *Polymorphia* and *The Devils of Loudun*.) This is an ethical question that deserves further investigation.

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minority. A journalist recently asked him how it feels to be the Puccini of the poor. Without pausing to deliberate, Menotti gave a typically pointed and charming reply: “Better than being the Boulez of the rich.”¹⁰

Bernheimer’s tone is typical: much of the critical language aimed at Menotti in this period is characterized by amusement tinged with derision. The composer’s music and his demeanor might be “charming,” but for most critics, his chosen proximity to Puccini over Boulez was not to his benefit.

In this context, *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* can be read as an artistic manifesto of sorts, justifying the composer’s conservative position and issuing a protest against the avant-garde establishment. Just like Penderecki’s *Devils*, *Globolinks* began as a commission from Hamburg Opera, led by Swiss composer Rolf Liebermann.¹¹ Menotti argued in a piece for the *New York Times* that he wanted to write an opera for children that would speak to the future; in contrast to his popular, pathos-heavy *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, he intended the *Globolinks* for the current generation “there is no mention of home, magic is confined to the realm of realistic possibility, and emotions are reviewed with cool sophistication.”¹² This is, perhaps, an unusual description for an opera about alien invasion, but in fact, I think Menotti’s words reveal something important about *Globolinks*—that the central crisis of communication, of the contemporary subject should be taken very seriously, even within its fantastical fairy tale/science fiction frame.

The story of *Globolinks* is a simple (and transparent) one: in his libretto, the composer spins an alien-invasion yarn, in which the invading aliens (the titular Globolinks) communicate only in electronic music. When they encounter humans, they are able to absorb those humans’ voices and replace them, instead, with the inhuman electronic sounds; this occurs when the Globolinks surprise Dr. Stone, a school headmaster, in his office (<https://youtu.be/Te-XVgq0sb4?t=1895>). The

¹⁰ Martin Bernheimer, “The Operatic Twain Meet in Santa Fe,” *Los Angeles Times* (31 August 1969): J34.

¹¹ The fact that both operas were commissioned through Hamburg and Liebermann is interesting, and suggests that further research surrounding that company and Liebermann’s creative goals might be illuminating for this project.

¹² Gian Carlo Menotti, “If the Emperor’s Naked, A Child Will Know,” *The New York Times* (21 December 1969): D19.

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Globolinks' tape music heralds their entrance and exit from the scene, and, after they have left, Stone finds that he no longer has a voice. Instead, he can only produce agitated, pointy shards of electronic pitches (Example 3).

(Dr. Stone opens his mouth to speak, but to his horror is only able to produce weird electronic sounds.)
(Dr. Stone öffnet den Mund, um zu sprechen, kann aber zu seinem Entsetzen nur seltsame elektronische Klänge herausbringen.)

Allegro

Timothy : (rushes in)
(kommt eilig herein)

TAPE 18 (only stage)
Dr. Stone *f*

(He starts to walk away,
(Er beginnt abzugehen,

(with routine subservience)
(mit geübter Untertänigkeit)

Yes, sir?
Bit - te?

Yes, sir.
Ja, sir.

then suddenly stops short
in his tracks as he realizes
that something is not quite
right.)
(dann bleibt er plötzlich stehen
und begrift, dass etwas nicht
ganz in Ordnung ist.)

TAPE 19 (only stage)
Dr. St.

TAPE 20 (only stage)
Dr. St.

(approaching the desk with a puzzled look)
(geht mit einem fragenden Blick auf den
Schreibtisch zu)

(worriedly)
(besorgt)

(spoken)
(gesprochen)

What?!

Was?

Would you mind re - peat-ing that?
So - gen Sie das noch ein - mal.

Are you all
Sind Sie ge-

46627

Example 3: Gian Carlo Menotti, *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* (G. Schirmer, 1969), 53.

Menotti's fable is not so difficult to decode. The one useful defense against the Globolinks is "real" music, made with human instruments and human voices. Without that music in their souls, as music teacher Madame Euterpova reminds her young students, "a hand of steel will clasp our hearts, and we will live by clocks and dials instead of air and sun and sea." The children, led by Euterpova, are able to weaponize their music and to chase away the invading Globolinks—and their inhuman voices and bodies—with a flourishing march in C major.

Although this narrative appears to present a very clear-cut (and heavy-handed) argument about traditional and avant-garde music making, there are a few factors here that, as in Penderecki's *Devils*, render the moral rather less transparent. The first of these is the unsettling realization that Dr. Stone never truly regains his voice, and, in fact, becomes a fully-fledged Globolink at the end of the

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opera. The displacement of his voice has therefore led to a displacement of his body, and the loss of his humanity; the power of music is not able to redeem him, even in light of his evident desire to be so redeemed. Secondly, at the very end of the opera, after the Globolinks have all departed (including the poor Dr. Stone) and Madame Euterpova's C major band have trooped away, a small Globolink appears on the scene, and it produces several more electronic tones before the opera closes in C (<https://youtu.be/Te-XVgq0sb4?t=4087>) What is the audience to make of these two events that leak over beyond the bounds of the didactic happy ending?

One thing seems clear: despite the "triumph" of traditional musical sounds here, the most memorable music and spectacle in this opera are those associated with the Globolinks. Menotti would later recall that, upon receiving the commission, he was inspired by the work of choreographer Arwin Nikolais. For Menotti, Nikolais symbolized everything that was exciting and enticing about avant-gardism in art.¹³ His work was colorful, modern, and fantastical, and he often employed unusual materials to remake the human body into alien shapes and forms. Perhaps most notably, Nikolais was, himself, an ardent supporter and creator of electronic music. Menotti approached the choreographer and asked him to participate in the project, explaining: "It is about us."¹⁴ Nikolais agreed, creating the distinctive and colorful costumes, stretching fabric completely over bodies rendered strangely mechanical with bold, spiraled shapes (Example 4). In these costumes, the dancers juxtapose fluid, slinking movement with agitated shaking and sharp angles.

¹³ John Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985), 168.

¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*



Example 4: Alwin Nikolais's costumes and stage design for *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* in Santa Fe; photograph from *High Fidelity* (November 1969): MA-25.

Menotti composed the electronic music for the Globolinks himself, and this fact seems relatively obvious when listening to the contours of this music. Although created through electronic means (processed instrumental sounds and synthesizers, etc.), the Globolinks' music often traces arcs that are redolent of Menotti's characteristic vocal writing. The more agitated, pointillistic lines are less clearly related to vocal idioms, but seem intimately connected to the shapes and movements of the Globolinks' bodies. In this, his method suggests Nikolais's own compositional approach, which was wildly eclectic and synthetic, borrowing sounds, styles, and musical material from other artists whose music supported his aesthetic aims in any particular project.¹⁵ Listening for instance, to

¹⁵ For more information about the music of Alwin Nikolais, I recommend Bob Gilmore, "The Music of Alwin Nikolais: A Provisional Study," in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries, and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia

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Nikolais's *Syx* (1976), one notices an interest in different timbres, textures, and rhythmic patterns that might support exploration in movement (<https://youtu.be/hLBOVTTK20c?t=53>). Menotti's electronic music for the *Globolinks* is more consistent in style and technique than Nikolais's own music, which relied heavily on collage and re-composition, but there is still a sense that Menotti's characteristic voice and point of view had been influenced or maybe even overshadowed by the choreographer's curiosity and willingness to experiment. Perhaps one might even recognize in Menotti a bit of Dr. Stone here, having been inhabited by the voice of another sound world and, unexpectedly, unable to divest himself fully from that world, even in the triumphant conclusion.

Although the tone and intended message of these two operas might be very different, one cannot help but notice that they both propose, at a fundamental level, that it is possible for the interior connection between body and voice (body and soul?) to be disrupted, invaded, or severed completely. Neither opera proposes a comforting solution to this crisis: Penderecki's *Devils* concludes with the specter of a man burning to the ground, fallen victim to the raging voices that emanate from Jeanne, and even *Globolinks*, with its cheery C-major finale, presents its audience with a character who has lost his humanity irrevocably. Scholar of comparative religions Jeffrey Kripal has written extensively about 20th-century Western fascination with the impossible, with the paranormal. Particularly in his discussion of artists and authors who invoke the paranormal in their work, Kripal's words may be suggestive here:

paranormal phenomena are not dualistic or intentional experiences at all, that is, they are not about a stable 'subject' experiencing a definite 'object'. They are about the irruption of meaning in the physical world via the radical collapse of the subject-object structure itself. They are not simply physical events. They are also meaning events. . . . If however, paranormal phenomena are meaning events that work and look a great deal like texts, then it follows that texts can also work and look a great deal like paranormal phenomena. Writing and reading, that is, can replicate and

Gitelman and Randy Martin, 132-153 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007). The other articles in this volume are also helpful in providing a broader picture of Nikolais and his work.

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realize paranormal processes, just as paranormal processes can replicate and realize textual processes.¹⁶

Kripal argues that the paranormal and the occult, as experiences, challenge the presumption (widely held as a condition within Western modernity) of a clear, stable division between subjects and objects—or between multiple subjects. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, many people turned to occulture as a conceptual space in which they might express their concerns about the instabilities, inconsistencies, and inequities evident within modernity. In producing various kinds of texts that invoked and performed the paranormal, then, they were able to name and to inhabit their anxieties and, in fact, to conjure the impossible.

I would propose that Penderecki's and Menotti's operas participate in this collective conjuring, but that the impossible knowledge arising out of this conjuring could not be controlled by the artist-creators. On the contrary, the special capacity of music to engage the realm of the extra- (or pre-) symbolic heightened the unsettling power emanating from these works. The extra-symbolic sonic experience of an unsignifiable voice, a voice simultaneously untethered to a corporeal sounding body and capable of inhabiting a body that is not its own—this experience took on a life of its own, beyond the operas and certainly beyond the composers themselves.¹⁷ The reception of both operas at Santa Fe, as critics took a step back and tried to come to terms with what, exactly, they had just seen and heard, reveals one thing above all else: critics and audiences understood that they had beheld something real, something challenging, and that they would have to process their experience of that challenge.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25-26.

¹⁷ Here, my argument resonates in interesting ways with the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim, especially *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). As Eidsheim discusses and critiques the work of Michel Poizat (*The Angel's Cry*), she opens a space for imagining the work that music (and the voice) might do beyond its material connection to a sounding body, beyond its capacity for symbol- or meaning-creation. "On some level," she argues, "while we primarily conceptualize—and accordingly, have access to these [vibrational] events—on linguistic and cultural planes, we still react perceptually and instinctually to them."

In comparing the two operas, many critics seemed to feel that they needed to declare an affiliation with one or the other. Their choice of Menotti or Penderecki related to their own aesthetic predilections, which, in turn, revealed a deeper-seated concern at the root of their preferences. These critics came to Santa Fe with a conviction that modern music—and especially modern opera—was in a state of crisis. Where did the future lead? What would the future of Western art music hold for its audiences? They portrayed this as a crisis between popularity and insularity or elitism, between tradition and futurity, between mass culture and the avant-garde. For example, Harold Schonberg, in the *New York Times*, wrote that going to the opera in modern times could be “grim,” and he fretted that “we are supposed to be so respectful of ‘modern music’ that even the musical puerilities of such a work as *The Devils of Loudun* are apt to be taken seriously.”¹⁸ At the end of his review, he suggested that *Globolinks* might mark something of a counter-revolution against the high-art pretensions, praising Menotti for producing a score that was modest, light, thin, and charming; in a word, Menotti was everything that Penderecki was not. The remarkably bland terms in which Schonberg characterizes Menotti’s opera, though, suggest that the *Globolinks* could hardly be lifted up as an inspiring standard for contemporary opera.

We have a sense here, and in many of the reviews, that, despite the tensions between the opposing aesthetic poles that characterized this crisis of modernity, critics and audiences feared the same outcome from all of the options: mediocrity. Whether art moved further into esoteric avant-garde experimentalism or turned to meet the demands of the popular audience, they worried that opera was losing its ability to communicate powerfully with its audiences. They worried that the genre was losing its transcendent power, its relevance and meaningful relationship to the contemporary world. And it is clear in the reception of these two operas that critics saw these two distinct compositional propositions in relation to that crisis, and, ultimately, they found both

¹⁸ Harold Schonberg, “Did Menotti Beat the Devils?” *The New York Times* (24 August 1969): D15.

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propositions to be inadequate. Martin Bernheimer for the *Los Angeles Times* set up a contrast between Penderecki (an “angry young man”) with Menotti (“ensconced in respectable middle age”), and explained that they represented different aesthetic propositions and even different institutional foundations, but then asserted that putting the two operas together on one weekend had been “fascinating, frustrating, and revealing.”¹⁹ Brought together in their attempt to create a modern response to the operatic genre, both composers had, in Bernheimer’s estimation, stumbled. Penderecki’s opera was ambitious but also “curiously impersonal work and thus forgettable.” Ostensibly, Bernheimer preferred Menotti’s opera, but he also constantly undercut his tepid praise with critiques of the “arch-conservative” composer, referring to his “bargain-basement mysticism,” and announcing that the opera had “nothing earth-shattering to say.” In its attempt to communicate so earnestly with its audience, then, Menotti’s work had perhaps become similarly forgettable.

There is more than a little evidence that critics found both operas to be something other than simply bland, though: they also found them to be disturbing. In their failure to broker a meaningful exchange between composers and audiences, this meaning had somehow exceeded or escaped the composers’ control—the composers had been overwhelmed by the material itself, and they were not able to resolve the crisis. This layer of critique is very clear in the reactions to Penderecki’s *Devils*. When it had premiered in both Hamburg and Stuttgart several months earlier, the critical response had been quite negative, with many reviews judging that the challenges presented by this material had simply defeated the young composer, rendering his characteristic musical voice unrecognizable. H. H. Stuckenschmidt, who had authored the program booklet text for the Hamburg premiere, wrote of the premiere that “music is scarce in all three acts of the opera. It is limited to illustrative work and production of atmosphere. . . . There is no doubt that he saw

¹⁹ Martin Bernheimer, “The Operatic Twain Meet in Santa Fe,” *Los Angeles Times* (31 August 1969): J34.

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himself as a musician overwhelmed by the excesses of the substance.”²⁰ In response to such criticisms, even from his most ardent supporters, Penderecki embarked upon thoroughgoing revisions to the opera before the Santa Fe production later that summer.²¹ Despite his efforts, though, the critics in Santa Fe echoed Stuckenschmidt’s sentiments over and over again.

Penderecki’s opera was underwhelming because it was overwhelming: there was too much content, too little music. The music that *was* present was employed in the function of sound effect; critics accused the Polish composer of “Mickey Mousing,” allowing his musical sensibilities to be manhandled by the external requirements of the text.

This criticism was especially sharp in relation to Penderecki’s treatment of Jeanne, whose possession scenes captured critics’ attention (even if they did not want that to be true). They were simultaneously attracted and repelled by the display of Jeanne’s body on the stage, and by the unruliness of her impossible voice(s). Repeatedly, these critics—and it must be acknowledged here that they were all male—invoked *furor uterinus* in their dismissal of Jeanne’s hysterical presence, and they refer casually to her disability as yet another component of the spectacle. Michael Steinberg, for example, wrote in *The Boston Globe* that Sister Jeanne “was a diminutive hunchback with an interesting face and a harshly derisive, mannish laugh, touchy, arrogant, histrionic, and excited . . . into an intolerable state of *furor uterinus*, she came to believe herself possessed by devils.”²² Steinberg here reasserted Jeanne’s own conscious control in this possession event, making her culpable for any

²⁰ H. H. Stuckenschmidt, “Die Teufel von Loudun in Hamburg,” *Melos* (August 1969).

²¹ The nature of these revisions is not entirely clear to me, because I have found little concrete evidence about what they entailed. Based on the criticisms of the Stuttgart and Hamburg productions, I would presume that he was working especially to balance the orchestral writing against the voices, so that they could be heard more clearly. The orchestral ensemble in this opera is massive, which presented practical problems on all fronts; in 2013, Penderecki completed another major revision for a new Warsaw production, and, at that time, he reduced the orchestral forces considerably. There have been a number of major revisions to this work (one of the biggest taking place before the Warsaw premiere in 1975, adding new scenes to shift the political heft of the opera); this topic requires further investigation outside the scope of the present paper.

²² Michael Steinberg, “Penderecki’s *Devils*: Sex and Religion go Operatic in Santa Fe” *The Boston Globe* (24 August 1969). Note: the question of disability in the character of Jeanne deserves exploration beyond the scope of this current paper.

DRAFT: Please do not distribute, duplicate, or cite this material without permission of the author and all depravities. Penderecki's music, in Steinberg's view, was "too primitive" to contain this threat, to rebuild order into the dramatic structure. As a result, Jeanne's threat leaked out onto the audience, who "are delighted to go to the theater and watch the Ursulines pawing each other, the spectacle of the deformed Prioress being given an enema as part of her exorcism, the bloody administering of the 'question ordinary and extraordinary,' and a good, smokey auto-da-fe."²³ The demoniac voices were therefore communicating effectively with their audiences, but this was not the act of communication that the critics wanted to see or hear.

In fact, many of the descriptions of Joy Davidson's portrayal of Jeanne seem determined to negate the threat to the audience represented by the fictional character herself. Martin Bernheimer wrote, for instance, that Davidson never "lost control" of the demanding part. More humorously, the critic for *Newsweek* noted that Davidson's rehearsal had been interrupted right as she sang the words "God is dead!" by a startling lightning strike; "I didn't mean it!" she called out, as if to reassure even the Almighty that she was separate from the woman whose role she inhabited.²⁴ A lengthy profile of Davidson in the local paper, *The New Mexican*, also hastened to reassure readers that Davidson was a normal, healthy young mother who loved to hike with her family (and who, despite her successes as a performer, was still filling an appropriately supportive role in relation to her husband, a medical researcher). The feature was accompanied by a large picture of a smiling

²³ Ibid. The investment of fears about modernity into intensely misogynistic language about women—and the imagination of women as a particular kind of degenerative social threat—is not a new development in the second half of the 20th century. Diane Jonte-Pace discusses the intermingling of misogyny and fears related to anti-Semitism in Freud's writings in her *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). This is a topic that deserves further development and critique in my own discussion of Penderecki's opera, and might be fruitfully brought into dialogue with feminist discussions of women and trauma in horror film—for instance, Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁴ "Opera Singer Finds Time for Fun in Spite of Heavy Workload," *New Mexican* (14 August 1969): A7.

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Davidson sitting with her family—a far cry from the anguished Jeanne, in whose guise Davidson appeared in many other reviews (Example 5).²⁵ Despite all of these attempts to limit

Opera singer finds fun in spite of heavy work load

Santa Fe, N.M., Thurs., Aug. 14, 1969 THE NEW MEXICAN A7

What's in a name? Joy—by any other name—would probably be just as cheerful and full of vitality as Joy Davidson in fact is. In spite of a grueling schedule of rehearsals for her role as Sister Jeanne in the American premiere of "The Devils of Loudun" on the stage of the Santa Fe Opera tonight, mezzo-soprano Davidson still finds time for family, fun and sun.

She was born in Ft. Collins, Colo., and now lives in Miami, Fla. But she has made this summer's debut engagement here a family vacation, accompanied by her husband, Dr. Robert Davidson, a clinical research psychologist, and their two children, Lisa Beth, 9, and Scott, 6. Needless to say, she considers the mountains and clear air of Santa Fe to possess all the comforts of her Rocky Mountain home.

Rob, as she calls her husband, is the son of R. S. Davidson Sr., who grew up in Pinon Alton. He introduced her to Chile and Spanish food, and she loves it.

"One compensation about my working during this vacation is that we have agreed that mother does not cook this summer. We eat out, and we are all really enjoying the authentic Mexican Spanish food here in Santa Fe," she said last week.

She has had to dig deeply into the character, with the help of her husband, who brought his professional ability to bear on the ill-fated process. Clinically, he said, she was a schizophrenic.

"Sister Jeanne was rejected as a child because of her hunchback deformity," she said. "Daughter of a high-born family, she was pushed aside and eventually sent to a nunnery.

"The girl was brilliant, full of life, and very, very frustrated. But her superstitious parents and society rejected her."

Jeanne became prioress of the convent of St. Ursula, then, historical evidence shows, contrived to put on a fake show of possession by devils.

In those days, diabolic possession was the explanation for what we would call today neurosis, psychosis, mob hysteria, epilepsy, and so forth.

"The girl was not only intelligent, but frustrated by the celibacy of convent life," the singer said. "She heard stories of Father Grandier, the handsome parish priest, and of his affairs with several women of Loudun.

"She summoned him to be father confessor to the convent. When she was turned down, she set out to prove the

age, and it was from her diaries, as well as public records, that Aldous Huxley drew material for his book "The Devils of Loudun," which John Whiting used for his play, "The Devils." This in turn was adapted by Krzysztof Penderecki for his opera.

"Rob helped me to understand Jeanne's character," Joy Davidson explained. "He also explained things in the score that mystified me," she said. "In several places, the composer has divided the chorus in to several parts, written a starting note, then

checked with the composer, and he told me yes, that's what they were.

"He had gone to a mental hospital and copied the brain-wave graphs into his score," she said.

The effect, which will be heard in performance tonight

and again next Wednesday, is reminiscent of Penderecki's "Threedy for the Victims of Hiroshima," which used strings. With the voice, however, the effectiveness is heightened.

"I think this shows the genius of Penderecki. Another composer, if he had thought of using this source, would probably have done it with electronic oscillators. It would have sounded mechanical, not human," she said.

"The chorus had to learn to cope with the atonal variations of a wiggling line, instead of notes, but they managed beautifully. The effect is exactly, I think, what the composer intended: a musical presentation of human insanity.

"I respect Penderecki so much to the intense musical support he has provided for this marvelous play," she said. "You can't whistle any melody from it, but I don't think that's bad, because music must go in many new directions."

Joy Davidson has high praise

for stage director Konrad Swinarski, who has put her through some fairly athletic paces in her role.

"His ideas are very creative in characterizing the enormously interesting people of this historical period," she said. "For years, opera was stand-up costumed concert, and I'm glad this is changing."

A singing career sneaked up on Joy after she settled into life with the young man studying for his Ph.D. in psychology.

"I was ready to devote myself to being a wife and mother, but grants from foundations and engagements with the Metropolitan Opera's national company and concert contracts were just too persuasive," she said.

Persuaded this summer to bring the family instead of going away and singing a lot and coming home, Joy Davidson may just have let herself become enchanted by New Mexico, just as she herself enchants an increasing number of opera listeners, whether she is on stage or off.



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Example 5: Images of Joy Davidson, taken from *The New Mexican* (14 August 1969) and *Saturday Review* (30 August 1969)

²⁵ Andrew Scahill makes a similar argument about popular press depictions of Linda Blair, especially after the second *Exorcist* film, in which her sexuality becomes a more serious part of the plot. *Seventeen Magazine*, for example, ran a feature that followed Blair preparing for a school dance, putting on makeup and dressing herself in an age-appropriate (and heteronormative) fashion. "Demons are a Girl's Best Friend: Queering the Revolting Child" *Red Feather Journal* 1, no. 1 (2010).

DRAFT: Please do not distribute, duplicate, or cite this material without permission of the author or to re-direct the threat presented by Jeanne's demoniac multivocality, though, it is her presence that comes through all of this reception. Her voice transcends the limitations of the composer and the genre, and the critics, becoming a subject that floats free, able to communicate its own affective content; this is a threat that cannot be easily neutralized.

The reception of Menotti's opera is subtler than that of Penderecki's, perhaps befitting the different scope of the two projects. However, as I mentioned above, there was a critical consensus that Menotti's characteristic and conservative operatic sensibilities had been overwhelmed by the posthuman, alien, "mechanical" Globolinks and their electronic music. In a 1970 review for a performance of the same production in New York, dance critic Arlene Croce noted that Nikolais—and by extension, Menotti—had been dominated by the materials, rather than dominating them (this, in her estimation, meant that they were "technicians" rather than artists). She complained that both men "are showmen who seem to suffer from the same exacerbated pride in their own seriousness as artists."²⁶ Few reviews of the Santa Fe performance were so explicit, but critics still managed to indicate that it was the spectacle of technology and of the Globolinks' electronic voices that they found most compelling; Menotti's libretto might have praised the value of "human music" above the posthuman, but it was the Globolinks that possessed their audience's imaginations.

Bernheimer may have been mild, therefore, in his estimation of Menotti's "bargain-basement" mysticism/modernism, but when it came to the production (and to the Globolinks), his tone shifted markedly. Calling the production "spectacular," he praised the Globolinks, who "took the form of Alwin Nikolais' long-familiar spiral spacemen, utterly appropriate here," and the way that their arrival "signaled psychedelic lighting on the stage and razzle-dazzle fireworks on the

²⁶ Arlene Croce, review in *The Dancing Times* (February 1970); reprinted in *The Returns of Alwin Nikolais: Bodies, Boundaries, and the Dance Canon*, ed. Claudia Gitelman and Randy Martin, 208-213 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

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faraway hills.”²⁷ Patrick Smith, writing for *High Fidelity*, went so far as to declare that Menotti’s writing for the aliens had “a quirkiness and a verve—as well as a sound of today—which his insipid melodizing everywhere lacks . . . Perhaps I was touched by a Globolink, but I do not in the least despair of Doctor Stone’s plight in having to join them at the end of the opera, for they are a far more interesting species than the cartoon caricatures who oppose them.”²⁸ In a complete subversion of Menotti’s moral lesson, then, the plight of Stone—who, it must be remarked upon, was performed by John Reardon, the same artist who had performed the role of Grandier the night before—is recast here as the happy ending. Rather than the destruction of humanity, this is the promise of transcendence via alien abduction.²⁹

In the wake of these two performance, audiences and critics in Santa Fe were left uncertain, unclear about their subjective relationship to the material. They attempted to separate the art from reality, but the traces of possession power crept through anyway. I would argue that it was precisely the sounds of possession that became the legacy of these two performances, extending and resonating beyond Santa Fe in August 1969. This is perhaps most true in the case of Penderecki. Although critics and scholars have repeatedly argued that Father Grandier, falsely accused of witchcraft, is the protagonist of the opera (his fate meant to transmit a moral about the evils of mass hysteria and of top-down political control), it is Jeanne who remains standing at the end. It is Jeanne whose voices remain in the ears of her audiences, the dense clusters fading into silence as the curtain falls. And it is those voices that took on a life outside the opera itself. Having been captivated by

²⁷ Bernheimer, “The Operatic Twain.” Reviews of Penderecki’s *Devils* also spoke about the sets and design (by Rouben Ter-Arutunian), mostly characterizing them as an additional layer of mystification and complication. Rather than a redeeming element, the staging of *Devils* served only to reinforce the production’s communication problems further.

²⁸ Patrick J. Smith, “Penderecki & Menotti: Pros and Cons, *High Fidelity/Musical America* 19 (November 1969): MA 25.

²⁹ This is a point that deserves further development beyond the scope of this project; Jeffrey Kripal has written extensively on the topic of UFO culture and narratives of alien abduction; also, see the work of Christopher Partridge. For example, in his “Understanding UFO Religions and Abduction Spiritualities,” Partridge contextualizes abduction narratives within a post-WWII theological turn; see *UFO Religions*, ed. Christopher Partridge, 3-44 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

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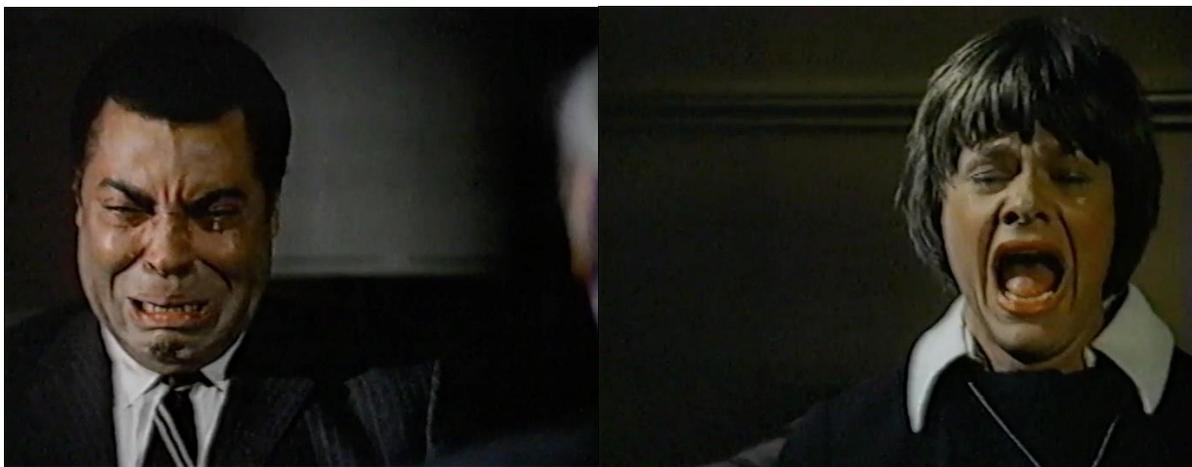
Penderecki's music (including *The Devils of Loudun*), film director William Friedkin decided to include several of the Polish composer's works in his new film, *The Exorcist* (1973). It seems that Friedkin may have been attracted to the sonic capacity of Penderecki's music to evoke a response in listeners without recourse to traditional melodies and musical signs that would index specific meanings—something that he wanted to avoid in the film's soundtrack.³⁰ He did use at least one excerpt of *The Devils of Loudun*; for example, the choral voices can be heard in this key moment at the conclusion of the exorcism, when the demon passes from Reagan into Father Karras, who then throws himself down the stairs (<https://youtu.be/HO1yidCEDX4?t=89>). To the extent that one might associate Penderecki's clustered textures with Sister Jeanne's multivocal, multi-subjective identity, then I think we might productively speak of Jeanne's voices having signified Reagan's possession. This might even extend to horror film scores more broadly, as Penderecki's sound world has become increasingly synonymous with the sound of horror. The *Conjuring* franchise is just one example; for example, Abel Korzeniowski, the composer for the 2018 installment, *The Nun*, is a student of Penderecki's, and the score draws heavily on the sonorities, timbres, and textures of the elder composer's avant-garde style.

In the case of Menotti, the question of direct “influence” on later horror soundscapes seems less fruitful. But certainly *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* was, itself, participating in an ongoing process of developing a sound world and a set of sonic tropes for alien abduction and UFO culture. The association of electronic sound and “modernist” musical idioms with futurity and posthuman experience has roots that predate this opera from 1968. But perhaps we might take note of the way that Menotti's opera partakes in the same possession metaphor as Penderecki's opera, and that this resonance between possessed voices and questions of subjectivity (and permeable divisions between

³⁰ Pamela Morrow, “Horror Soundtracks and the Unseen Demonic: *The Exorcist* (1973)” *The Carleton Graduate Journal of Art and Culture* (accessed 16 February 2019): <https://carleton.ca/arhistory/wp-content/uploads/Morrow-.pdf>

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subject and object, or subject and subject) becomes more prominent in science fiction film during this period. For example, the television film *The UFO Incident* (1975), based on the first widely-reported alien abduction case in the United States, draws on familiar musical tropes to establish the sound world of aliens (flexibly atonal, probably intended to sound dodecaphonic) and of humanity (clear harmonic foundation, functional tonality). But the strongest sonic impression of this film does not arise from its conventional soundtrack; rather, it is the grain of the actors' voices (James Earl Jones and Estelle Parsons) as they scream and cry and shout throughout their hypnosis therapy sessions (Example 6). Their voices are totally different from their everyday, normal voices in these sessions, testifying to the transformative encounter with the otherworldly, with the paranormal.



Example 6: Images from *The UFO Incident* (1975); dir. Richard A. Colla; Universal Television

In sum, the sonic implications of possession were disturbing in 1969 at the Santa Fe Opera, and they continue to disturb audiences today. The sound of an impossible voice emanating from a human body—whether that voice belongs to another human subject, or to a posthuman, alien being—raises fundamental questions about the relationships that we, as listeners, have to our own voices and to our *selves*. The voice of possession, as it reverberates through various forms of media in the late 20th

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and early 21st centuries, therefore represents a productive site for the investigation of political power, feminist agency, and individual and collective subjectivities, challenging us to ask of ourselves: what are the larger implications of these impossible voices? Are they real? And what might it mean—what might it change—if we answered yes?