Twelve Notes, Twelve Endnotes

Exile is a singular state and Stanley Glasser's Exile is at once a musical composition and an engagement with that state, suggests Stephanus Muller.

The power of the intelligence functions by projecting a certain luster upon (words), by polishing them and making them glisten; this power, erected into a system, is called culture — pyrotechnics against a night sky of nothingness.
— E.M. Cioran, A Short History of Decay, p. 20

Note 1
For all the internal contradictions, tensions, non-isomorphic experiences, tragedies and opportunities that lurk in "exile", the word has its own laws of signification of which the first is that its emotional value always gravitates towards the personal, the individual and the singular.

Note 2
Stanley Glasser'ssong cycle Exile for tenor and harpsichord was first performed by Michael Goldthorpe (tenor) and Martyn Parry (harpsichord) on 1 December 1981 at Goldsmith's College in London. Composed to texts by fellow South African Adolf Wood, the collection of five songs was also commissioned by Michael Goldthorpe.

Note 3
Described in a Times Online obituary of 8 September 2009 as a "backroom boy of literary journalism", Adolph Wood was passionate about jazz and published an article on Schoenberg at the age of twenty. His Scottish mother was a good pianist.

Note 4
The story of Stanley Glasser's exile from South Africa is well known, but only sketchily documented. In all the time that I have known him, which is now ten years, he has never spoken or written to me about it.

Note 5
Written for performance in an academic context (Goldsmiths College, where Glasser became professor and head in 1969), Exile forms part of a subsection of Glasser's oeuvre not musically attempting engagements with either popular culture or African music.

Note 6
Glasser's more popular theatre work (for example on Mr Pajita, The Square and King Kong) and his compositions that directly engage Africa musically or rhetorically, provide an unusual stylistic context to the creation of "aesthetically significant" music such as Exile.

Note 7
The compositional principle of the work is twelve-tone.

Note 8
As a work put forward by its composer as worthy of aesthetic reflection, Exile links with a larger body of work by Glasser concerned with African influences and popular music styles through the unwavering commitment to the importance of melody.

Note 9
The defining surface feature of the work is a fluent contrapuntalism.

Note 10
The identity of the series in Exile is clearly connected to pitch correspondences between different series (place) and only secondarily to intervals (distance between pitches or space in abstracted variations of a single series). This adds to the recognisability of the melodies and therefore their connectedness.

Note 11
On 19 January 2009 I received a letter from Stanley Glasser explaining why he had refused to see me a few months earlier during a visit to London. He had been hurt by my academic and personal neglect of him over a long period of time.

Note 12
Music is also autobiography, and musicology should therefore also speak about exile.
1 This other country

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1. "Exile" is always the narrative of one person or entity, an "I" or an "us". Therefore we speak not of "exiles" (the condition, that is), but of "exile", it is not that exile cannot be other than its volatile laws of signification dictate, but it can only be other in a violently interventionist way. It is, in other words, the nature of a discourse on exile to explode. Like nuclear fusion, it can be done under experimental conditions but the applications of this procedure outside the laboratory of ideas create enormous problems - ethically, materially - that offend our sense of propriety and inevitably overwhelm and replace the fundamental question on the nature of exile with a moral outrage that asks "do we dare to" and "should we"? In South African discourse on music we have already started disturbing the delicate equilibrium of "my" story or "our" story by splitting exile into its constituent parts. There has been considerable collateral damage. This is consistent with the violence of South Africa.

2. Martyn Parry writes in his performance note to Exile that "The instrument envisaged in the directions for registration is a classical one, with the following disposition: UPPER (I) 8'; LOWER (I) 8' 4' BUFF. The registration markings in the score are by Parry, with the only registration indications from the composer consisting of indications of volume (mf, p, f, etc.), which would imply register changes (or articulation changes) where the texture of the writing doesn't achieve the desired effects. A considerable variety of colours and dynamic shades is possible with these means, but this does not detract from the decision by the composer not to use the more lyrical sound of the concert grand piano to carry the message of exile. The voice, for its part, is rarely taxed, with the melodic line only skirting the top B once on the word "die" in the last song, the painfulness composed into the music with a major 7th interval approach to the note.

3. Adolph Alexander Wood (1928-2009) was born in Krugersdorp. In 1950 he left for England after studying for a degree in English and Italian at the University of the Witwatersrand. From 1975 he worked as an editorial assistant at the Times Literary Supplement for almost three decades (Times obituary, 8 September 2009). He collaborated with Glasser on a number of projects, among which was the publication of a collection of traditional Songs of Southern Africa in 1968 and the choral work Bathovia (1988). Wood's texts are not great poetry, but they effectively capture the sadness and tensions of a state of exile that was clearly deeply felt. The first poem, "This Other Country", asks "Who would willingly go the exile's way / knowing today the bleakness of unbelonging?" The poet stands on a bridge over the river Thames and goes over "a grey imperial city" while thinking of the "unending sadness of this country that is not and never can be home". How strange it is, he continues in the second poem entitled "Still Strange", to find this place of exile to be still strange after thirty years spent enjoying freedoms not possible at home. After the passing of such a long time, even the "something like happiness" becomes blighted "by the incomprehensible hurt of others dying". A brief pastoral reminiscence of South Africa at the start of the third poem, "I Love the Clear Sky of Home", turns into a reflection on the consequences of remaining at home: death of the soul / slow withering of the mind / eternal turning over of doubts and regret at loss of friends and love, of misplaced joy in creation, of thirst of hatred killing the blood, of sodium drying up the hearts, the inexorable onset of madness: I am isolation more bitter than any felt / in this unknown land.

In the fourth and penultimate poem, "Of Exile There are Many Kinds", geographical specificity and autobiography expand towards a universal vision of exile. The poet affirms that there is no exile more brutal than that "of those who are forced from home by the madness of war" or by "tyrants' decree condemned by reasons of state, or by others' hatred of their race". But then, acknowledging Baudelaire and Mallarme in the images of "the swan wandering through the estranging city" and "the pain of the captive albatross mocked by sailors", we find recognition that the condition of the artist is always one of exile. The last poem, "Let Them be Joined", returns to the bridge over the Thames. Cannot Africa and England be joined "as the banks of the river of London are joined / by the bridge on which I am standing?"

4. In the Hurton digital archive (accessed through Getty Images) there is a photograph that appears with the following description:
19 February 1961: University lecturer, Stanley Glasser and jazz singer, Maud Damon, on the balcony of their hotel in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. They have just arrived after fleeing from South Africa, where they were charged under the immorality act, which forbids sexual relations between members of different races.

The date is a mistake (it should be 1963), as Glasser had only arrived in London on 22 January 1963 (S. Glasser, 1963). Michael Green relates the incident that led to Glasser's fleeing South Africa in his book Around and Above, but erroneously connects the incident to the production of King Kong (52). Carol Ann Muller cites Nixon, who only refers to Glasser as Damon's "white lover" (101). In conversation with Hilde Roos, Peter Voges describes the affair between Glasser and Damon as "an open secret" (97). The Internationale Situationniste no. 9 of August 1964 cites Le Monde of 16 January 1963 when documenting: The Cape Town tribunal has issued warrants for the arrest of a thirty-five-year-old white South African musician, Stanley Glasser, and a twenty-six-year-old musician singer, Maud Damon, charged for infringing the Immorality Act that forbids sexual relations between whites and blacks or mulattos. The accused couple have fled into the British protectorate of Bechuanaland from which they will be able to reach Tanganyika.

In a letter written from Laundry Cottage, Durban Road, Wynberg and dated 16 January 1963, Mona Glasser writes to Glasser's head at the Cape Town College of Music, Erik Chisholm, who was then visiting Oxford: I had seriously thought of moving, but where and why? The children are happily and conveniently at school. I have no job to lose here and I'll probably find myself wherever I go. The only decision I have made is to refrain any decisions until I have gathered myself into the semblance of one piece again ... Even now I can say it has not penetrated with him what he has risked and lost - but, curiously enough, one of my early thoughts was to wonder how Oscar Wilde felt.

5. Glasser recognises two ways of listening to music: as background and as an object of aesthetic interest. With Exile he was attempting to write music intended as an object of aesthetic interest. Glasser writes this kind of music best when he writes for small forces and limited scope. Apart from Exile, other examples from his oeuvre include the beautiful, freely dissonant Four Inventions for violin and viola composed almost a decade earlier in 1972 and the continuously expanding set of piano pieces entitled Brit-in-Brix, consisting of miniatures (some actually quite long) that are mostly very challenging musically and pianistically. In these miniatures, where the creative process starts from a single idea that is briefly elaborated before the piece ends, and where each piece begins anew, there is less evidence of repetitious patterning and the stylistic androgyny that occurs in a more expanded form like the Sonata (2004). In summary then: there is an important part of Glasser's oeuvre that presents itself as works intended for serious aesthetic consideration. These works are often characterised by their instrumental nature, small forms and the compressed and non-developmental presentation of the musical ideas.

6. There is stylistic reciprocity between Glasser the musical theatre practitioner and Glasser the African musical explorer. The Musical Director of King Kong is clearly more recognisable in the avuncular jollity of An Affair: Palm Court Music for violin, cello and piano (1987). For instance ("To be played with morning coffee, afternoon tea, at the cocktail hour and after the theatre") even in the exuberance and theatricality of choral works like TheBallroom and the Crocodile (1996) and the more serious cantata
It is a condition of exile to remember the best and forget the worst.

But the worst remains the best reason for leaving. To return home would be death.

To have returned home would have been death. Death of the soul. Slow wounding of the mind.

Of doubt and regret at loss of friends and love.
7. Glaser employs at least twenty-seven entirely different twelve-tone series over the course of the five songs. The first song, "This Other Country", introduces three series, all sharing the initial semitone movement of B flat to A. Preceded by a rather lengthy introduction constructed of prime forms and transpositions of all three series that are contrapuntally combined, the three series of a single form is repeated three times once before this short song comes to an end. At this point it is of course possible for the composer to derive the entire remaining pitch material of the cycle from what I will call series a, b and c (leaving the prime forms aside, another 141 possibilities to be exact). However, the composer introduces six new series in the second song before recalling the prime form of series c in retrograde right at the end with the setting of the words: "and warm winds, soon or late, melt the steric ice of lakes". The fourth of these six new series, g, is very closely related to this retrograde version of c. In fact, it is only the interchange between the last two pitches of g - on the word "dying" - that destroys an identical relationship. Thus the setting of the words "Still stranger after thirty years of something like happiness / I mildly blighted / by incomprehensible hurt / of others dying" suggests a parenthesis of suggestive savorness cruelly twisted into a difference by his own pain. The third and fourth line of this song, entitled "I Love the Clear Sky of Home", recalls series a, b and c in truncated six-row segments before restating in full the initial series a and b coinciding with a return to the initial tempo of the first song. Series a in prime form accompanides the words "To return home would be dead", to have "dead:to have returned home would have been death" and series b in prime form intones the words "death of the soul, slow withering of the mind, eternal turning over of doubt and regret at loss of friends and love." If the initial three series stated in the first song have by now acquired meaning over and above their macro-structural function, there is little doubt that their recognisable contextual identity allows any further interest in the known by concluding the song with the prime forms of four entirely new twelve-note series. The longest song in the cycle, "Of exile there are many kinds", contains nine new series in prime forms, and links with what went before only briefly with a return for series b in prime, and a shortened fragment of the retrograde of c. This is the clearest of the five songs, describing the kinds of exile that are possible and ending with an evocation of Baudelaire's "pain of the captive albatross" set to a fragment of b. It is perhaps not surprising that the last song, "Let them be joint 4", contains an introduction and intrude that contrapuntally combine all three initial rows: a, b and c.

8. In his inaugural lecture entitled "Quo Vadis? The Problem of Cliché, Convention and Aural Reference in Contemporary Composition", Glaser notes that the convention and the cliché ("a stereotyped figuration") can "only arise in a musical culture that is mature" (2). He continues: it seems, at least from the technical viewpoint, from the point of view of composition, West European Classical music since 1950 has failed to offer a serious alternative to devices by which to draw an audience into a piece of music. Only musical cliché entrenched in convention may best succeed in doing this … (12). It is significant that, for Glaser, cliché and convention are not pejorative. Like other examples of Glaser's instrumental works, written and composed in 1950-60, they don't lapse into formulae, or what he might call cliché. However, there is in Exile as elsewhere in his oeuvre, evidence that Glaser finds memorable, conventional melodic writing important. In the Four Inventions mentioned earlier, for example, the melodies are not extended, but brief surface gestures rather than large carriers of ideas or sources of material. In Exile they are tone rows. However, melodies they remain. It is therefore hardly surprising that Glaser stresses melody as the most important communicative element in music (S. Glaser, 1994). It seems that his ideas on convention and cliché could well offer an explanation for the constrained melodiousness of his twelve-tone writing and his disinclination in the more abstract systematic possibilities of this choice. Of the notion of twelve-tone writing in itself is a cliché of the twentieth century at the time Glaser is writing Exile. His use of twelve-tone pitch procedures in principle and the technique of his nontonal possibilities of developing the inherent potential of his rows, signal exactly the opposite of the alienation and estrangement associated with the condition of exile. For a composer whose easy lyrical gift was no bridge home — perhaps because it was so frequently African-inspired — twelve-tone writing presented itself as a particularly rich source of musical language. This tells us less about Glaser and more about the South African audience he no doubt hoped would hear these songs.

9. The predominance of melody as a communicative element (and therefore key to accessibility) other than his intention to "announce to his music the essence of a subjective aesthetic interest". It could be argued that the construction of the melodic contours as often repeated twelve-tone rows in prime form (and thus recognisable if not exactly tonal) mediates between what could be regarded as Glaser's popular lyricism and the world of "serious" music. Whereas melodic cliché is prevented from falling into banality by the twelve-note technique, harmonic cliché is kept in check by a double bind: the restricted pitch material and contrapuntal writing. The first song sets the tone with the fugal entries (on B flat and E flat respectively) with both hands on separate manuals sounding B and E flat respectively. In bar 10, with the first entry of the tenor, we hear a three-voice fugal imitation between harpsichord and voice. Another particularly fine example occurs in the second song from bars 8-10, and the fifth song in bars 35-42. The third and fourth songs are clearly and significantly different. The third song, "I Love the Clear Sky of Home", changes to a fantasie-like improvisatory keyboard style and a freeer parlando in the voice part most noticeable in the time indications ("1", "2", "4", etc.) that estimate the duration of each bar in the absence of a strict metre. Although metre is restored in the fourth song, counterpart is not. The harpsichord assumes a conventional accompaniment role to the voice's reflections on the many kinds of exile. It is only on the fifth song, "Let Them Be jointed", that contrapuntal weaving is restored — significantly with the prime forms of the three rows first stated in the first song.

10. The high number of series used in Exile and the closely related but unidentical correspondences between many of these series affirm the concreteness of place rather than an abstraction of space. The pitches (combined with the contrapuntal writing) emphasize polyphony, an adaptation to achieve sounding coherence, rather than an attempt at "serious" music.