

# Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938)

Jonathan Taylor de Oliveira

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# Biographical Outline

- ▶ 1938 - Born in Westfield, Massachusetts
- ▶ 1947 - Giving recitals of Beethoven's Sonatas
- ▶ 1954-58 - Harvard University
  - ▶ Walter Piston
  - ▶ Roger Sessions
  - ▶ Randall Thompson
  - ▶ Claudio Spies
- ▶ 1958-60 - Princeton University
  - ▶ Milton Babbitt
  - ▶ Oliver Strunk
- ▶ 1960 - Rome
  - ▶ Luigi Dallapiccola
  - ▶ Performed works by Stokhausen, Boulez, Cage, Bussotti, and Kagel
- ▶ 1966-71 - Co-founded Musica Electronica Viva with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum
- ▶ 1977-2003 - Liège Belgium
  - ▶ Professor at the Conservatoire Royal de Musique

# Stylistic Information & Pieces

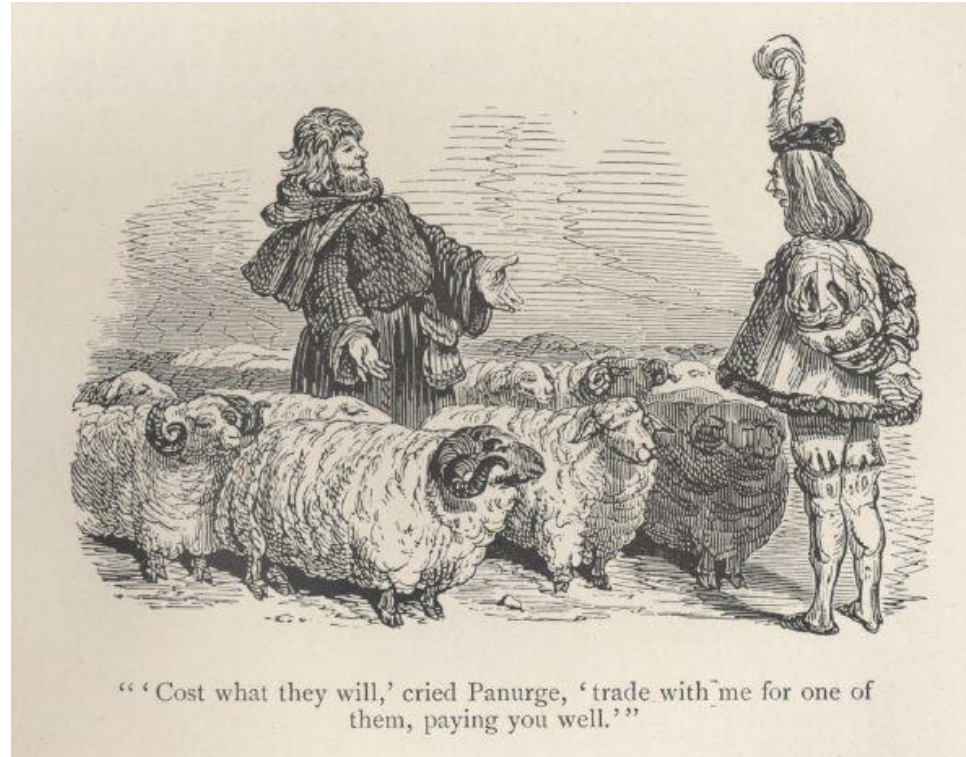
- ▶ Wide range of styles

- ▶ Improvisation
- ▶ Serialism
- ▶ Minimalism
- ▶ Tonal Music

- ▶ Music Rooted in political and social events

# Les Moutons de Panurge (1969)

- ▶ Any number of instruments
  - ▶ Also for nonmusicians
- ▶ Modal melody developed by adding notes to the end
- ▶ Melody compressed by removing notes from the beginning
- ▶ Written section followed by improvisation
- ▶ *Mouton de Panurge* = a person who blindly follows another
- ▶ Obs.: Always *ff*. A musician who gets lost MUST attempt to STAY lost!!



# Coming Together / Attica (1971)

- ▶ Written after the 1971 Attica Prison Riots
  - ▶ Uses words from a letter by Sam Melville, killed during the violence
- ▶ For Speaker and Variable Ensemble
- ▶ Protest against:
  - ▶ Subhuman living conditions in prisons
  - ▶ Government-endorsed violence



# The People United Will Never be Defeated (1975)

- ▶ 36 Variations on Sergio Ortega's *¡El Pueblo Unido Jamas Será Vencido!*
- ▶ Style becomes less and tonal towards the middle of the piece
- ▶ Extended Techniques
  - ▶ Whistling
  - ▶ Banging the lid of the piano

*The people united will never be defeated,  
The people united will never be defeated...*

*Arise, sing  
We are going to win.  
Flags of unity  
are now advancing.  
And you will come  
marching together with me,  
and so you'll see  
your song and your flag blossom.  
The light  
of a red dawn  
already announces  
the life to come.*

*Arise, fight  
the people are going to win.  
The life to come  
will be better.  
To conquer  
our happiness.  
and a clamor  
of a thousand fighting voices will rise,  
speaking  
a song of freedom.  
With determination  
the fatherland will win.*

*And now the people,  
who are rising in struggle  
with a giant voice  
crying out: Forward!*

*The people united will never be defeated,  
The people united will never be defeated...*

# The Price of Oil (1980)

- ▶ For two speakers and two instrumental groups.
- ▶ Protesting oil exploration-related disasters
  - ▶ 7 Occurances between 1975 and 1980
- ▶ Graphic Notation

THE PRICE OF OIL: PART ONE

DEALER  
I COME IN AT 8 O'CLOCK

WINDS

RIGHT PERC.

WORKER  
IT WAS A TREE TRUNK THE NINE

WINDS

LEFT PERC.

AND LIKE AN ANIMAL ON THE HUNT I SPREAD MYSELF ALL OVER

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a grid of vertical lines. The score is divided into two main sections. The first section is titled 'THE PRICE OF OIL: PART ONE' and contains lyrics for two speakers: 'DEALER' and 'WORKER'. The 'DEALER' part has lyrics 'I COME IN AT 8 O'CLOCK' with a circled 'K' under 'I'. The 'WORKER' part has lyrics 'IT WAS A TREE TRUNK THE NINE'. The second section, marked with a circled '1', contains lyrics for two speakers: 'AND LIKE AN ANIMAL ON THE HUNT I SPREAD MYSELF ALL OVER'. The score uses graphic notation with vertical lines and brackets to represent musical elements. On the left side, there are labels for 'WINDS' and 'PERC.' (percussion) for both the 'DEALER' and 'WORKER' sections. There are also circled letters 'K' and 'R' in the score.

# Other Pieces by Frederic Rzewski

Other Important Pieces		
Piece	Date	Instruments
North American Ballads	1978-1979	Piano Solo
Antigone Legend	1982	Voice and Piano
Pablo Neruda in Exile	1983	Voice and Piano
The Triumph of Death	1987	Voices and String Quartet
String Quartet	1987-1988	String Quartet
*The Road	1995-2003	Piano Solo
Nanosonatas	2006	Piano Solo



# Conclusion

- ▶ Pieces available for download on [imslp.org](https://imslp.org)

*“Asked if it’s possible actually to affect politics through music, Mr. Rzewski answered, ‘Probably not, [...] But you have to write as if you could. You can’t be sure. You might.’”*

Zachary Wolfe, “The Composer Frederic Rzewski: In His Notes, Protest and Politics,”

*The New York Times, May 5, 2016*

# References

- ▶ Cornelius Cardew, “A note on Frederic Rzewski,” In *The Musical Times*, Vol. 117, No. 1595, 1976, 32 At <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bgsu.edu:8080/stable/pdf/958921.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0c579a3b8ea0ff226e742c60ea71edde> Accessed February 27, 2018
- ▶ Daniel Varela, “Frederic Rzewski,” In *Perfect Sound Forever Online Music Magazine*, 2003, At <http://www.furious.com/perfect/rzewski.html> Accessed February 27, 2018
- ▶ *Frederic Rzewski*, In The Living Composers Project, At <http://composers21.com/compdocs/rzewskif.htm>, Accessed February 27, 2018
- ▶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panurge>
- ▶ **Videos:**
- ▶ *Le Moutons de Panurge*, performed by Anna Liongueras – saxophone, Isabel Gehweiler – cello, Yuriko Sekiguchi – percussion, At [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldCTNc3fL\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldCTNc3fL_w)
- ▶ *Coming Together/Attica*, performed by Richard Youngstein – bass, Karl Berger – vibraphone, Frederic Rzewski – piano/electric piano, Alvin Curran – Synthesizer, Joan Kalisch – viola, Garrett List – trombone, Steve Ben Israel – speaker, Jon Gibson – saxophone, At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyZSzLOGctA>
- ▶ *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, performed by Frederic Rzewski, At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLGeJ9mrNfU>

Thank You!

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