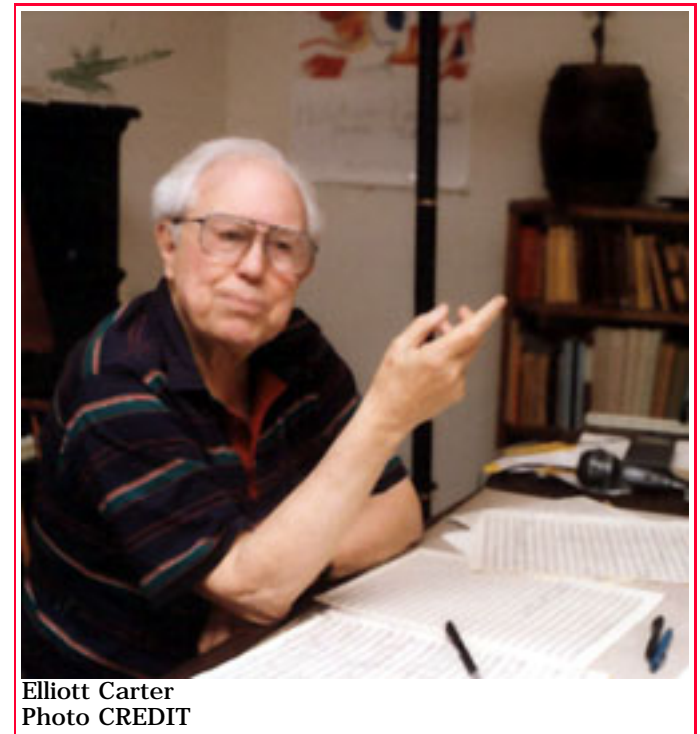


The Career of a Century

NewMusicBox Editor Frank J. Oteri visits Elliott Carter at his home

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Elliott Carter
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Elliott Carter: It's a very different period, you see. There's been a big history of change that was caused largely by the big [Depression](#) during this time. And in the early days, in those early days, there was a) the recovery from the [First World War](#) and a very great effort on the part of many countries, particularly France, to present their culture in this country so that the French government subsidized a good many performances of all kinds of things in this city in order to recover from the awful shock of the war... And, beside that, there was an [income tax](#) difference - it was enormous. That these wealthy people were willing to put up a lot of money for the performance of *Wozzeck*, and wealthy people came to these performances. It was all sort of a very wealthy upper class that was interested in modern art. The [Museum of Modern Art](#) was started by such people. When the Depression came and the whole tax thing was entirely changed, there was a very different world of people. And the wealthy people were no longer the wealthy people that supported the arts. Support for the arts came from people who were not that wealthy anymore, and so everything diminished a good deal.

Frank J. Oteri: And that's something that we're still experiencing to this day.

Elliott Carter: Oh, yes. Of course. There's been a big sociological change. There always were people like myself who were just students or didn't have a great deal of money who went to these concerts. But in the early days, the concerts were also largely supported by older people who had money, who wanted to be "with it," who were very interested. Modern music at that time was something to be "with," something to follow: it was a new and exciting thing.

Frank J. Oteri: So do you feel the changes were more due to changes in economy than changes in the music itself?

Elliott Carter: I think the changes in the economy were certainly one of the effects of all of this, but that wasn't all. Even in the post-First World War world, people already began to see, particularly in France and Germany, a new change in music. Composers like [Poulenc](#) and [Milhaud](#) and [Honegger](#), and in Germany, composers like [Hindemith](#) and [Krenek](#) began to show a whole new point of view about what was called avant-garde music. And there was a return, in the case of a composer like Poulenc, there was a desire not only to suggest Mozart but to suggest that music be very eclectic. There was a whole period of eclecticism that persisted, first in France, and then it came to this country. And that was also connected with the whole notion of populism, the very advanced, dissonant music that had been written before the war and was being written still a little bit afterward, was considered an elitist thing. And then there was a powerful desire to not write elitist music, and to write music that was more popular. And finally, of course, [Aaron Copland](#), who was a great friend of mine during a good part of this period, wrote [Billy the Kid](#), he started with *El salón México*, and then wrote *Billy the Kid* which was on the same program with my *Pocahontas* in 1939. And Aaron was very concerned with writing music that would draw a different kind of public than the older kind of music had been drawing.

