

The Pulitzer Prize for Music

It's Time to Alter and Affirm

A statement by the Pulitzer Prize Board, June 1, 2004

The variety, vitality and creativity of high-quality American music today make the Pulitzer Prize for Music more important than ever.

After more than a year of studying the Prize, now in its 61st year, the Pulitzer Prize Board declares its strong desire to consider and honor the full range of distinguished American musical compositions – from the contemporary classical symphony to jazz, opera, choral, musical theater, movie scores and other forms of musical excellence. The Board also notes that many composers move among those various forms and that the Music Prize competition should reflect that artistic richness.

Accordingly, without seeking to favor any particular form of music, the Board announces the following changes in the Music Prize, effective with the 2005 competition:

- First, the definition of the Prize will be revised to encourage greater diversity in entries while assuring even-handed evaluation of compositions.

Currently, the definition reads:

“For distinguished musical composition of significant dimension by an American that has had its first performance in the United States during the year.”

The new definition reads:

“For a distinguished musical composition by an American that has had its first performance or recording in the United States during the year.”

The revised definition adopts a broad view of serious music. Thus, the definition drops the words “significant dimension” in relation to a composition because the words might have limited entries by applicants or limited the evaluations by jurors. The definition also accepts the public release of a recording as the equivalent of a public performance, which will widen the prize’s reach.

- Second, the guidelines that accompany the revised definition will no longer require the submission of a score. Rather, the guidelines will say a score is “strongly urged.” That change, the Board believes, will provide sufficient latitude for improvisational work.
- Third, the jury pool will draw from a wider range of expertise. For a decade, the jury has consisted of four composers and a music critic, and all have made valuable contributions. Under the revised approach, composers will continue as a

majority of the jury but will be limited to three slots to permit greater participation by presenters of musical programs, orchestra conductors, musical artists and other knowledgeable members of the music world.

Through the years, the Prize has been awarded chiefly to composers of classical music and, quite properly, that has been of large importance to the arts community. However, despite some past efforts to broaden the competition, only once has the Prize gone to a jazz composition, a musical drama or a movie score. In the late 1990s, the Board took tacit note of the criticism leveled at its predecessors for failure to cite two of the country's foremost jazz composers. It bestowed a Special Citation on George Gershwin marking the 1998 centennial celebration of his birth and Duke Ellington on his 1999 centennial year. Earlier, in 1976, a Special Award was made to Scott Joplin in his bicentennial year.

While Special Awards and Citations continue to be an important option, the Pulitzer Board believes that the Music Prize, in its own annual competition, should encompass the nation's array of distinguished music and hopes that the refinements in the Prize's definition, guidelines and jury membership will serve that end.