

contact

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January 20th: BBC Pebble Mill Studio

BBC Invitation Concert

This concert juxtaposed John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano, the movements of which were inspired by the "permanent emotions" of Indian tradition with classical Indian music. The pianist John Tilbury was giving the Cage work its second Birmingham performance in a matter of weeks, the first having been given by Richard Bernas in the Barber Institute on November 10th, 1971. Tilbury's performance of what must surely be one of the pinnacles of 20th century keyboard music was very different from the delicate crystalline account given by Bernas. The former seemed more aware of the earthly emotional side of the work and consequently gave a darker, more restless performance.

The darker side was matched by the beautiful raga chosen as the second of the two late evening ragas which completed the programme. Technique and artistry of the calibre exhibited by Ramnarayan (sarangi) and his young tabla partner Suresh Talwalkar is beyond my power to criticise. Western musicians could learn much from the sheer joy in spontaneous musical creation radiated by these players, not least through their facial expressions.

But how much longer are we going to let the strait-jacket of the formal concert atmosphere form a barrier between these players and their audience when, as explained in the introductory remarks, the success of their improvisation leans so heavily on intimate contact between them? The BBC's feeble gesture in this direction was the provision of a few joss-sticks when what was really needed was, say, provision of cushions on the floor so that the audience could relax and maybe lose its inhibitions. It was nice to hear the bowed sarangi instead of the perennial sitar.

ANTHONY CARVER.