

contact

Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Barry, Malcolm. 1976. 'Review of *Cornelius Cardew: Four Principles on Ireland and Other Pieces*'. *Contact*, 13. pp. 38-39. ISSN 0308-5066.

[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

CORNELIUS CARDEW: FOUR PRINCIPLES ON IRELAND AND OTHER PIECES
 Cornelius Cardew (piano)
 Cramps Records (Milan) CRSLP 6106, Nova Musicha N.6
 (Not yet available in this country)

MALCOLM BARRY

The career of Cornelius Cardew has been consistent in at least one respect. Since about 1960 he has been the most challenging single English musician, continually questioning, and causing to be questioned, the criteria for judging music, either through his own work or by being the agency through which novel developments have passed and are brought to our attention. The ex-assistant of Stockhausen who outdid *The Master* with the intricacy of the ground plan of *Treatise*, foreshadowed the new attitude to tonality in *Volo Solo* and became the harbinger of relaxation and simplicity with *The*

MICHAEL TIPPETT AT 70

PHILIPS RECORD		SCHOTT PUBLISH	
SYMPHONY No. 3	6500 662	Study Score Ed. 11148	
MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE	6703 027	Study Score Ed. 11158	
		Vocal Score Ed. 10778	
KNOT GARDEN	6700 063	Vocal Score Ed. 11075	
CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA		Study Score Ed. 10844	
RITUAL DANCES (Midsummer Marriage)	6580 093	Study Score Ed. 10207	
conductor COLIN DAVIS			
PIANO SONATAS Nos. 1-3	Paul Crossley 6500 534	No.1 Ed. 10123	No.2 Ed. 10815
		No.3 Ed. 11162	
CHILD OF OUR TIME	6500 985	Study Score Ed. 10899	



PHILIPS

marketed by **phonogram**

Published exclusively by

SCHOTT

48 Great Marlborough Street London W1V 3JN

Great Learning remains in the vanguard: his current preoccupation with the political significance of (his) music has been influential. Regular readers of *Contact* will not need reminding of Cardew's attitudes to his own earlier music and of the purposes of his current compositions.¹

This record includes music from the *Piano Album 1973*, the score of which is reviewed separately in this issue, and *Piano Album 1974*. Thirteen short pieces, firmly tonal and almost defiantly euphonious, are played by the composer. There are pieces based on Chinese folk and theatre songs, Irish revolutionary ballads and traditional proletarian songs as well as original compositions. The techniques used are those of virtuosic decoration and variation, though the principal theme is never obscured by the latter and remains firmly in the forefront. A variety of styles is used, from a Brahmsian treatment of *The Red Flag* through Debussy and other techniques of expanded tonality to a straightforward transcription of a rock idiom. The pieces sound well and idiomatic and are, for the most part, played definitively, although there are one or two examples of a single bar where a 're-take' would not have come amiss.

The record was made in Italy and, at the time of writing, no British distribution has been arranged. An aspect of the difficulty of distribution may well lie in the cover, for if the problem of the embodiment of concrete ideas in music remains a philosophical discussion, photographs in which the words "You are now entering Free Derry" figure prominently or which picture demonstrations in support of the Provisional IRA leave no doubt of the sympathies of this particular musician and, presumably, the message of his music. Such presentation is scarcely likely to commend itself to those large record companies that arrange distribution for small labels. Cardew is not Paul McCartney, pace *Give Ireland back to the Irish*.

The music is simple and convincing, the melodies and rhythms clear and the harmonies unproblematic and 'right'. All the pieces have significance beyond themselves, i.e. they are composed with a specific meaning in mind and they aim either to persuade or to document. Whether this is achieved, given the use of generally unfamiliar material (Chinese songs, for example) is open to doubt, although the unfamiliarity is, perhaps, not such a problem: programme notes on music of all kinds seem an essential part of concerts and, once the embodied meaning is communicated verbally, the music can speak on its own terms. Compare Liszt's propagation by paraphrase of 19th century music; the activities of Cardew are not so different in type.

The deliberate simplicity of the music, its style and purposes, represent the challenges of Cardew's current output rather than the music itself: a position opposed to that of most contemporary music. Most of Cardew's works force the reviewer to reconsider his criteria for the assessment of music and to state a position, for the familiar props disappear. For a moment music is no longer to be understood as an autonomous language, and historical process as marching with Darwinian force towards the future with originality as its sine qua non. The dialectic of its evolution is suspended precisely because an avantgarde composer dares to write music that has signatures of time and key; if the doctrine of progress is so tenuous (or so vague as to be all embracing), one wonders why the tunnelling towards the ultimate audio-musical ideal continues beneath the streets of Paris.

Cardew might thus be seen as an instrument of liberation for composers — "let a hundred flowers blossom" — for, in his wilful disregard for 'musical history' by the extreme eclecticism of his style, the precarious mannerism of our age is thrown into relief: there is little historical necessity for most avantgarde music, either actually or musically. The record could also be liberating for listeners, once they have realised that the lack of problems in the music is *not itself* a problem, and if they have the courage to tear the blinkers of a fake musico-historical consciousness from their ears.

The purpose of the music is ideological and extra-musical; judgement of its success in this direction must be a matter for each individual, and the music does not fail if the record is not in the list of best selling albums. The success of the music as music depends also on the individual listener, and if he has the courage of his own ears he may even come to outgrow the somewhat patronising attitude taken up towards Cardew in certain quarters. If the avantgarde past is forgotten, 'light music' might be a suitable epithet for the record, providing pejorative associations are not implied.

The past, however, cannot be forgotten. Cardew still has 'a name': hence the record and hence this review. Whether any other musician starting from Cardew's present position would receive this attention is at least doubtful, which is, perhaps, a vindication of Cardew's attitude towards avantgarde music (he calls it "exclusive, fragmented, indifferent to reality" and attacks it for its class character). The record, simply by being made, has thus already achieved a kind of success.

NOTES:

¹See *Contact 8* (Summer 1974), pp. 34-37, *Contact 10* (Spring 1975), pp. 22-27 and *Contact 11* (Summer 1975), pp. 44-45.

RECORDS RECEIVED

CRI 163	Charles Ives; William Flanagan
CRI 190	Charles Ives
CRI 233 USD	George Crumb; Stefan Wolpe
CRI SD 261	Karel Husa
CRI SD 283	George Crumb, Charles Jones
Obscure	No. 1 Gavin Bryars
	No. 2 John Adams; Gavin Bryars; Christopher Hobbs
	No. 3 Brian Eno
	No. 4 Max Eastley; David Toop
Virgin V2038	David Bedford