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NEW MUSIC DIARY

KEITH POTTER

The idea for this new column originally came about as a result of my move to London from York, and the opportunity I thus have of hearing a substantial amount of new music in live performances regularly. Not that we were exactly starved of this in York, where the university music department has been famous for its championship of contemporary music (that's why I went there). All too many people assume — and may infer from my opening remarks — that London is the *only* place to hear new music: especially those who live in London. That there's more than a grain of truth in these rumours cannot be denied (that's partly why I left York; but not the only reason). However, we do the efforts of quite a lot of people quite an injustice if we take no account of, not only new music, of course, but music-making in general outside the metropolis; there's a lot of it about if you look (listen?) for it, and, like the new magazine *Classical Music Weekly*, we shall take our geography lessons to heart (in our own way). Indeed, I found it somewhat ironic to think that, having studied at no less than three universities outside London (one of the few healthy things about the Academic Scene is that it isn't nearly so centralised as everything else), I should be coming to London just as everyone *else* is starting to take devolution seriously. . . .

But enough of the philosophy. Except to say that I mean to put into this column anything (well, *almost* anything) that I think happens to be appropriate and, eventually at least, to make it as newsworthy as anything can be which only appears three times a year. I also don't intend to keep it to myself for ever, but to let other writers have a go when I've got it established (or had enough).

Wednesday September 22

Actually I hadn't moved at this point, but had to be in London and very much wanted to include a mention of the concert in St. John's, Smith Square on this date given by the Saltarello Choir under its

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relatively new conductor, Richard Bernas, for it included the first performances of pieces by Richard Orton and Graham Hearn specially commissioned by the choir for the occasion.

The past tense already reveals that this isn't a *real* diary: I wasn't quite sure of my format and so didn't write as I went along as true diarists do (also I'm too lazy: and busy). It would also appear at the time of writing that the programme notes for this concert got lost during the move. (Must attempt to keep the diary up in future.)

Orton and Hearn, and Bernas too, were founder members of Gentle Fire, a group that was formed at York University in 1968 (well before my time) where Orton was already teaching and the others were students; Orton left in 1971 and the group itself folded 'officially' towards the end of 1975. Hearn's *Two Choruses* is delightful and typical: one piece for double chorus, one of which attempts to seduce the other into taking a traditionally romantic (and functional?) view of the piece's basically triadic harmony. Hearn's music should really be done more often: I've heard very few works of his, but every one has been individual, striking and well written. He still teaches in Harrogate: that's one reason why London hardly ever hears him (note the fallacious supposition: 'doing his music' has to be 'in London').

Orton's *The Seed of Time* wasn't finished: only eleven out of 35 poems, brief fragments mostly, by George Murphy, were heard. The piece is confusing, no doubt partly due to this (Bernas hopes to do it complete some time), but mainly because the style is so unlike anything of Orton's I've ever heard before: much more traditional, and not only in terms of tonality and those 'traditional' elements that can be used 'experimentally' (think of Orton's own *Pièce de Résistance*, a piano piece written for Bernas). Some parts of this new work were straight-forwardly old-fashioned and others were straight-forwardly vaguely modern (the latter the more surprising of the two, the mixture even more so). A long car journey back to York with the composer gives me a chance to talk to him about why he did it: he's *feeling*, like a lot of composers (Hobbs, White, Cardew, Rzewski, Blake, Bedford, Potter) more traditional, more concerned with some kind of roots (but all these composers feel it for different reasons: subject for an article?).

Bernas himself turned temporarily into a jetset conductor, flying back to Warsaw the next day to conduct Xenakis's *Ensta* and Richard Meale's *Interiors/Exteriors* (see review of the Warsaw Autumn in this issue). He's a good example of the modern all-round musician: pianist, conductor, composer, reviewer (not necessarily in that order). And of the diversification of interests that led to the extinguishing of the Gentle Fire.

Friday October 1

Having now hit town, I go to an evening of African drumming and dancing given by Adwe at the Africa Centre. Not really a reviewing job, but I'd commend to you the work of the Centre,^{1,2} though I have heard better drummers and I've *certainly* heard better compering. I intend to get some African drumming going at the College I teach at: the people who make the drums, are involved with the group, so I seek them out and arrange to visit the workshop in Chalk Farm.

Sunday October 3

First in a series of twelve Sundays of new music at the Institute of Contemporary Arts between October and Christmas which promises to be really good: the first time the ICA has taken contemporary music seriously for ages. They kick off with the first of three sessions by Option Band (basically the players of Dreamtigger minus Douglas Young and Peter Hill). No short shrift here: concert at 4 p.m., discussion with the composers at 5.45 and a full evening concert at 8 p.m. All part of the policy: you could call it making *Contact* with the composers and players. Intermittently successful on these terms, despite some disorganisation over starting times, and having adequate programme notes (I never *did* find out the titles of all the pieces). It's a pity that every corner of the ICA has to be used round the clock for maximum economy: so the performers have to clear up from the previous night's disco before they can rehearse and a jazz band of mediocre quality prevents all conversation in both the hall and restaurant for some while after 6.30. But Lise-Martine Jeanneret, the Swiss pianist and director of the group, preserves a delightful informality, and got over a very commendable percentage of the foreign composers of whom she was making a special feature: on this occasion Jean-Yves Bosseur and Francis Miroglio, both from Paris.

Bosseur already has enough space in this issue; we heard a chunk of the tape of *Anna Livia's Awake* in the first concert, and the evening saw a performance of a very good piece for two cellos and slide projectors, *Souvenez-vous*. Miroglio's music (a flute and piano piece and *Refractions* for flute, violin, piano and percussion) makes far less impression, but I was surprised to like enormously a work by Hans Zender, *Muji No Kyo* for speaker, flute, cello and piano: evocative, spacious and beautifully unadulterated, quite unlike the impression I previously had of him as a Boring German Composer of big orchestral pieces and a good conductor of German contemporary Meisterwerke, but a hopeless stylist when it came to Cage's *Cheap Imitation*. Also pieces during the day by Simon Emmerson, André Boucourechliev (who didn't make it on this occasion, but did the next week), a quite nice performance of George Crumb's *Vox Ballaenae* almost enhanced by the rain thundering on the asbestos (?) roof (something else the ICA hadn't

thought of), but a lousy one of *Prima Vista* by Kagel to end.

Wednesday October 6

Another very valuable series starts up, the Composers' String Quartet from American are playing an enterprising four-concert survey of American string quartets in the Purcell Room under the auspices of the Park Lane Group. I can only get to the two Wednesday programmes: the others clash with the ICA series on Sundays. Some stupendous playing and some stupendous pieces: notably Elliott Carter's First Quartet in this programme. Ives' First Quartet, written when he was only 22, was good to hear (piquant experimentalism), but why didn't they play the Second? I still don't like Milton Babbitt (Fourth Quartet: thank goodness they *didn't* play his ubiquitous Second), and suppose that I never shall.

Thursday October 7

'New Music from West Germany' at the Wigmore Hall (how I hate the place); the first of *another* series — this time mounted by the Composers' Guild of Great Britain and planning country-by-country surveys in return for concerts of British music abroad. This concert was promoted in association with the Deutscher Komponisten-Verband; next the country is reported to be East Germany, which could be interesting. A good idea, but a bad concert: mostly 60s serialism and cautious aleatorics, none of it justifying the word 'new'. The best pieces are two by Isang Yun (a Korean now living in Berlin): a piano trio and a trio for flute, oboe and violin: less notes, more thought. Hans Zender (*Trifolium* for flute, cello and piano and Quartet for flute, cello, piano and percussion) turns out to be a Boring German Composer after all (strange to hear three pieces by him in the space of five days). Dieter Acker, Frank Michael Beyer, Norbert Linke and Wolfgang Steffen are the filling in the sandwich formed by two slices of Yun and Zender, and were all, I think, in attendance. Some sturdy work by British performers, including Susan Bradshaw (piano), Irvine Arditti (violin), Kathryn Lukas (flute) and Rohan de Saram (cello): the last two are both in Option Band and must have spent a lot of the previous week over Zender: they were both in all three pieces.

A footnote (not a real one): when I was in Glasgow for Musica Nova (see Barbara Winrow's report on this elsewhere in this issue) the Goethe Institute was showing an exhibition of scores, tapes and information called '28 Young Composers from the Federal German Republic'. Norbert Linke was the only composer in this collection to appear in the concert as well; I didn't really get a chance to do the Exhibition justice, but some composers (e.g. Rolf Gehlhaar, Johannes Fritsch, Michael Vetter) are worth listening to if the exhibition comes round again (don't know if they have any plans for it to).

Sunday October 10

The second Option Band programme. This one centered around the dishy young Polish harpsichordist Elizabeth Chojnacka (don't ask me how to pronounce her name), who specialises in new music for the harpsichord and in the afternoon gave a demonstration of new techniques, unfortunately not very illuminating. I did have the uncharitable thought that harpsichordists using new techniques can only make unsuccessful copies of those of the piano, though effects inside the harpsichord were more interesting that you might perhaps at first suppose. The young composer David Sutton played a harpsichord piece of his that could easily have been written for the piano.

It was a pity that Miss Chojnacka didn't play any pieces using the 'inside' in her evening recital, which otherwise was a brilliant display of a lot of less than brilliant music: except for the incredible virtuosic finale of Xenakis's *Khoai*, written for Miss Chojnacka and here, presumably like many of the other pieces in her concert and the Option Band series as a whole, receiving its first performance in this country: the pages cast impatiently on the floor as she devoured them.

Works by François-Bernard Mâche, Betsy Jolas, André Boucourechliev and Luc Ferrari, some involving tape, made up the rest of her programme. Luc Ferrari (whatever happened to him? Oh, he went into political music just like the rest) didn't make it and the performance of his *Ephémères* by Miss Chojnacka and Option Band was cancelled, but we heard *Socialist Music?* for harpsichord and tape: strange new avantgarde light thrown on the composition of 'political music'. Miss Chojnacka also played this piece at the Warsaw Festival; see John Shepherd's review.

And in the afternoon Boucourechliev, a former Bulgarian who has lived most of his life in Paris, turned up to talk interestingly about and to play tapes of his music: two of the *Archipel* pieces were played in the Option Band series, No. 4 for piano by Lise-Martine Jeanneret on October 3 and No. 5B for harpsichord by Miss Chojnacka on this occasion. Boucourechliev is a worthwhile composer as well as a notable Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann scholar, and his *Archipel* series develops in complex and sometimes original ways the open form notations of Earle Brown and others (he specially mentioned Brown in response to a question on this point). Someone asked if he had written any pieces other than those called *Archipel*: he has, but it's just that we don't get to hear them here. Perhaps we should.

Wednesday October 13

The third of the Composers' Quartet series and for me probably the most rewarding programme which should, however, need no introduction. Copland's *Two Pieces* are slight and fairly early, but Ruth Crawford Seeger's Quartet of around the same time is a stunningly original and advanced piece which is fortunately known now through the Composers' Quartet's own recording of it.³ Cage's even more original contribution to the traditional medium par excellence and Carter's Second Quartet completed the programme. I was particularly sorry to have missed the Carter Third Quartet and Henry Cowell's Fourth in the Sunday concerts among other things. The Park Lane Group did us an excellent service in making possible such a panoramic view of American quartets in the 20th century. The only pity is that more people didn't take advantage of it.⁴

Sunday October 17

Third and final Option Band programme. This was called 'The Audible Eye', while the first went under the name of 'The Optical Ear': I'd take too long to discuss the differences. Various ramifications in the ordering of the three different programmes presented us with a real bumper collection on the last day, and presumably it was considered more prestigious by the New Music Crowd, since there was a good audience from 4p.m. onwards.

Two pieces were introduced by their composers in the afternoon. Rolf Gehlhaar's *Solipse* for cello and tape delay is original and beautiful, with a structure that is in general so clear and well-rounded that the short last section almost seemed not to fit. (I seem to be using the word 'original' a lot: does a piece *have* to be original to be worthwhile, and what constitutes originality anyway?) Gehlhaar, formerly with Stockhausen in Cologne, where he continued to live until this summer, is/was (?) one of the Feedback group⁵ and is now teaching at Dartington.

Hugh Davies is someone we don't hear so much of as a 'straight' composer: he's spent a lot of time making his own instruments and improvising, but he seems to bridge the two 'worlds' very well: indeed, I don't think he'd want to emphasise the difference that much. His *Raisonnement* (the title means both reasoning and resonance) for piano was written for Miss Jeanneret and uses implements inserted between the keys of the instrument to enable the piece to explore the wide range of harmonic resonances obtainable by such means but not possible with just two hands. Brian Ferneyhough's *Cassandra's Dream Song* for flute was intelligently introduced and, it would seem, excellently played by Kathryn Lukas (what performance problems Ferneyhough presents!); an early song by David Bedford completed the afternoon's proceedings.

In the evening Jeremy Dale Robert's *Reconciliation* for speaker (John Macleod) and musicians tackled different methods of presenting two poems and the problems of reconciling 'the essentially alien relationship of words and music', to quote the composer. He himself regards it as a study and I would agree with him; I should like to hear his more recent explorations into this territory. *Personnage*, one of the two pieces in the programme by Makoto Shinohara, a Japanese composer now living in Berlin, involved a mime (John Macleod again), lights and tape in a pessimistic trio: the one 'live' element subjected to bombardment by the other two. The young Graziane Finzi from Casablanca, who now lives in Paris, contributed *Songes* for ensemble and dancer: effective choreography and dancing (a splendid performance from Avagail Ben Ari); music that made me want to hear what Miss Finzi can do without the visual aids. Rohan de Saram and Alan Brett (cellos) and Richard Witts (percussion) gave a superb rendering of Kagel's *Match*: that particular 'intellectual safety valve' (to quote Witts' provocative programme note read aloud before the performance) still seems relevant ten years on (for more on 'relevance', read on).

Option Band are to be congratulated on bringing a wide range of, in particular, European music to our attention and in getting so many of the composers over to talk about their work. Why, then, were their concerts hardly reviewed at all in the national press? More attention to details in the mechanics of keeping your audience interested and informed, as well as more rehearsals, would make things even better. I look forward to hearing them again and trust they will include Robert Dickinson's percussion piece *She was only the drummer's daughter, but she knew how to beat a retreat* in their next London programme.

Another (artificial) footnote: it was interesting to have heard two pieces by Hugh Davies in one week. On the Tuesday before this concert Radio 3 had broadcast a two-year-old tape of a Gentle Fire concert at Glasgow University which included his *Gentle Springs* for five springboards (electronically amplified instruments of Davies's own invention) as well as Richard Bernas's *Almanac for October* and the first British performance of Stockhausen's *Spektren* (from the *Für kommende Zeiten* series). Davies was, of course, also a member of Gentle Fire (I've covered four of the original six in this review); his piece stood up two years on, I thought, with no trouble: in fact I preferred this largely improvised work to his fully notated piano piece. Bernas's piece stood up less well. I say this because I know that some of the group were unhappy at the tape being broadcast at all after so long. Such is their momentum that they have long since moved on to other things (as

illustrated above) and so they didn't all feel it was relevant any more.⁶ What kind of music is it that dates so rapidly? Does it say anything *less* for it that it doesn't 'last' for its creators? Perhaps it still does for others, anyway. The whole 'relevance' concept needs looking at, I feel, though I'm not doubting the sincerity of the performers. Anyway, I shouldn't image the Beethoven thought too much of his First Symphony in 1827. Some people, I know, feel this approach is too consumer-orientated: instant art, here today and disposed of tomorrow. But surely canned, 'historical' art, preserved for posterity, is just as much a 'consumer product'?

Sunday October 24

First, Japanese Gagaku music at the Albert Hall in the afternoon, including a piece for Gagaku musicians by Takemitsu. I'm hardly qualified to write about this, but the sense of anticipation I felt was strangely unfulfilled by the event itself, beautiful though both music and dancing were. Perhaps it was the hall, and the many latecomers who were allowed to shuffle and mutter their way in during the whole of the first half hour as though it were a boxing match. (I'm told my new next door neighbour is Head of the Ushers at the RAH: must have a word with him.) What opportunities we now have for listening to and seeing oriental music and dance! This group of musicians and dancers of the Imperial Household, Tokyo were brought here by the London Music Digest; they last came five years ago. Did they *really* do only one performance in this country? What a wastel Steve Reich (twice), Richard Meale and György Ligeti are on the menu for the rest of this season's Digest programmes.

Then on to the ICA again for the first of two Music Now presentations in the Sunday series, an evening of music by the dynamic duo of Christopher Hobbs (percussion, piano, reed organ, toy piano, bassoon etc.) and John White (percussion, piano, reed organ, toy piano, tuba etc.) 'Aren't they *versatile*?' whispered an American friend of mine when the bassoon and tuba appeared after the sets of percussion pieces and piano duets and solos. Well, yes, they are, and their slick professionalism (not exactly a characteristic of all experimental presentations and even slipping slightly here on occasion) seems partly to be the cause of their recent successes at the National Theatre foyer concerts where others have apparently failed. (Must get along to one of those foyer concerts some time. While I'm about it I must see the famous four-and-a-half-hour *Tamburlaine the Great* and perhaps even *Hamlet* too, for the productions at the National Theatre of both of which Harrison Birtwistle has written the music. And I might even get

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along to *Il Campiello*, with music by Michael Nyman. I hear occasional good things about the theatre, which is more than some seem to hear. . . .)

This concert was supposed to be a retrospective of the duo's music over the past four years, from the post-PTO percussion pieces to the post-prandial piano pieces and duets. I found myself wishing they'd play more of the old systems-based percussion works, much though I enjoyed the piano duets in particular, and some of the music involving bassoon and/or tuba. No doubt they feel piano duets are more relevant these days. . . .

Saturday October 30

The University of London is holding a series of four programmes of contemporary music played by the Twentieth-Century Ensemble of London directed by Edwin Roxburgh at the Royal College of Music from Thursday 28 to Sunday 31 October, with open rehearsals, introductions to each piece and public discussions after each concert. As an exercise in persuading students that new music is worth hearing, it is only intermittently successful. What's the solution? These occasions are always put on with lots of good intentions, like the Option Band series, but how often do they end up preaching to the converted? Or should we be preaching at all?

This programme had more harpsichord music (strange how these coincidences crop up) and contained one rather obscure harpsichord piece, *Nine Rarebits* by Earle Brown, and one very obscure harpsichord piece (didn't get the title) by Thon Tan Thiet, both introduced and played by Harold Lester. Both were actually quite decent pieces (the Brown I knew before), but the demand for contemporary Vietnamese harpsichord music written in Paris can hardly be large enough to entice students away from whatever it is they do on Saturday nights. John Casken's *Music for the Crabbing Sun* for flute, oboe, cello and harpsichord was receiving its first British performance. His pieces are finely crafted and becoming increasingly personal extensions of the largely Polish models from which his musical style has sprung. Edwin Roxburgh's own *Convolutions* for mezzo-soprano, tenor and '18th century' ensemble was also a worthwhile piece.

Sunday October 31

A long day's music, beginning with the fourth and last of the RCM concerts, consisting of Ligeti's *Ramifications* for out of tune string orchestra (one group tuned a quarter of a tone out) and Lutoslawski's *Preludes and Fugure* for 13 strings (in tune), introduced very perceptively by Richard Steinitz and John Casken respectively. The performances themselves unfortunately rather suffered from lack of rehearsal. Surely adequate rehearsal time should be an essential part of such a 'didactic' enterprise? Both the Saturday and Sunday concerts, with the introductions but not the discussions (the latter chaired by Arnold Whittall), were taped by the BBC for eventual broadcast.

Then on to the ICA *again*, this time for four and a half hours of experimental music from Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton, Dave Smith and John Lewis.⁷ A total of no less than 35 pieces in this programme, most of them recently written and all performed by the composers using drums, pianos, electric organs, baritone horns, accordion, voices and a few other things. In the first half Skempton's pieces, several of them familiar, continued to delight in their simplicity and natural-sounding use of both systems and free tonality and chromaticism, while Parsons has always been drier, less witty, more ascetic (it's not surprising that he's the one who tends to relate systemic music to serialism, which he used to use, and now increasingly to compose according to classical models such as the canon). On this occasion his seven canons for two baritone horns became rather wearing. The drum pieces, however, retain all that is best in his music: the simple opposition of developing rhythmic structures in a quietly dramatic counterpoint.

Smith and Lewis's music is often easier on the ear, and the second half was something of a relief, with longer and more expansively textured pieces, some real systemic winners (like Lewis's *Blue Beat Bicycle* for two electric organs) and others

surprising new departures (like Smith's *Moderation in Nothing*, a non-systemic (?), spacious, very free-sounding and magical piece for ocarina, recorder, wine glasses, bell and voice (a deep bass hum), electric organ, electric piano, guitar and cymbals). Even Smith's baritone horn duos (Smith and Parsons are the protagonists of these instruments) make light of their arithmetic, especially the first one which was sheer delight. And Lewis managed to combine those things with organs in his *Brontosaurus Boogie*. But some of Smith's pieces are also known for their obsessive adherence to Mode 2 (of Lili Boulanger and Messiaen fame) or the tritone: his *Diabolus Apocalypsis* for two electric organs, electric piano and acoustic piano lived up to its fierce title, with everybody beating a systemic hell out of everything for what seemed an eternity. I certainly never expected to see Howard Skempton hit a piano (that admittedly could have been said to be on its last legs, if it had had any) so hard that the strings started to flee from the instrument in terror.

This column is long. In fact it is probably too long. But I've not included whole areas of new music — jazz and free improvisation, by and large, for instance — which I should have liked to and intend to another time. In particular we shall be drawing attention to the work of both the London Musicians Collective (successor to the London Music Co-op) and the National Musicians Collective in a future issue.

Martin Mayes, who organises music for Action Space, has sent me details of their Festival of the Audience which goes on through November and December and is just starting as I write. The Drill Hall⁸ opens on the same day as the festival (November 5) as a centre for artists and the community: I hope it will become a regular venue for musical activities.

I'm also requested to draw your attention to 'E-Music', which describes itself as 'an ongoing concern in which traditionally trained musicians can get together as both composers and performers within a group situation to revitalise contemporary music-making by interacting as members of a social model and not as caretakers of stolen property within the concert hall museum case' (pew!). The group will meet every Saturday morning at 10a.m. in the Moberly Hall of the University of Keele, where Robert Dickinson, one of E-Music's founder-members, is a postgraduate music student: their first event was scheduled to be a performance of *Marsyas Protocol* by Pierre Marietan (like Bosseur, a member of the French Group GERM) on November 10. There is also, I believe, a London branch of the group (a nice touch). 'So as to avoid cultural insularity' contact will be made with organisations such as Feedback in Cologne, Logos in Ghent and New Horizons in Berne, which we either have already featured in *Contact* or will be doing so in the future. Contact Robert Dickinson for details.⁹ Since he is no longer at Sheffield University, the Sheffield Musicians Co-op featured in *Contact 12* has now folded; as has the York Co-op too. Pity.

NOTES:

¹ Who ever heard of a diary with footnotes? Still, it seems the best place to put all the most useful pieces of information.

² Africa Centre, 38 King Street, London WC2, tel. 01-836 1973.

³ On H-71280.

⁴ For a useful discussion of this series, see Stephen Walsh, 'Abundant Vitality', *The Observer Review* (Sunday October 17, 1976), p.31.

⁵ For details of this see Tim Souster's review of the *Feedback Papers* in *Contact 14* (Autumn 1976), p.36.

⁶ See also Adrian Jack, 'In whose time?', *The Listener*, Vol. 96, No. 2481 (October 28, 1976), p. 556.

⁷ For a good introduction to the systemic music of these four composers as well as that of Hobbs and White and the systemic art group see Michael Parsons, 'Systems in Art and Music', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 117, No. 1604 (October 1976), pp. 815-818.

⁸ The Drill Hall, 16 Chenies Street, London WC1, tel. 01-637 7664.

⁹ Robert Dickinson, Department of Music, University of Keele, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG.