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Reviews and Reports

TADEUSZ BAIRD: CONCERTO for oboe and orchestra
Edition Peters No. 8324, 1975 (£12.50)
CHINARY UNG: TALL WIND for soprano, flute, oboe, guitar and cello
Edition Peters No. 6562, 1975 (£5.00)
WERNER HEIDER: STUNDENBUCH for twelve voices and twelve wind instruments
Edition Peters No. 8201, 1974 (£14.25)
TORU TAKEMITSU: GREEN for orchestra
Edition Peters No. 66300, 1969 (£6.00)

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Only last autumn in these pages John Casken¹ berated Peters Edition for the high retail price of their music. Consider then these four scores: who is going to find £14.25 for a 53-page reproduction of Werner Heider's admittedly legible original manuscript? While in none of these scores is there any real waste of space, the price of each works out at roughly 30p a side. Now this holds true whether it's an MS copy (Heider) or printed (the rest), large staves (Ung) or small (the rest), large pages (Baird — 30 cms. by 42 cms. rising to 69 cms. for fold-ups, or small (the rest — just larger than quarto). At least with the Baird you feel you may be getting some value for money, for it is the best printed of this group, coming as it does from the formidable stable of PWM in Poland. (In passing, I might mention a feature of PWM's 'open' attitude to publishing. Just one year ago they brought out a catalogue (Katalog Dysponenda) of *all* the music — of every conceivable kind, from pop to propaganda, from medieval to modern — which they have published in the 30 years since the firm was reconstituted as a state concern after the war.² Included are details of which reprints are now available, how many copies have been printed, the price then and now (often the same if not cheaper) and how many copies remain in the shops as of January 1, 1976. It's the sort of socio-musical document I'd very much like to see published by our own houses.)

Tadeusz Baird's Oboe Concerto (1973) is his second composition for oboe and orchestra and is dedicated, like the *Four Dialogues* (1964), to the German oboist Lothar Faber. While in the earlier piece the oboe is primus inter pares in a chamber ensemble, the concerto uses a full-size symphony orchestra (triple woodwind, no oboes, plenty of percussion) as a characteristically active backdrop. The concerto re-emphasises Baird's fondness for four-sectioned compositions, and while he himself has asserted that 'the four parts [are] strictly differentiated in respect to their character, mood and tempo', the myriad of minute cross-references between the sections gives the work more the feeling of a Lisztian fantasia. Not, I hasten to add, that Baird's style bears any aural resemblance to Liszt, although in this piece his customary use of vague rhythmic textures is juxtaposed in the second and fourth sections with metred ideas of a decidedly more conventional nature. Baird, who was born in 1928, continues to base his style on an 'atomic' post-serial technique which in his hands results in a rather neurotic handling of pitch and instrumental colour. In the solo part especially he seems riveted by fast stepwise crabbing movement and by angular lines given a keener cutting edge by the pervasive use of short rests and grace notes. Because this concerto does not make any radical departures from Baird's style of the preceding decade, some may feel that it is something of a pot-boiler. His personal stamp is, however, unmistakable and I wouldn't swap this 17-minute score for any of a number of other regurgitations coming from some of his supposedly more eminent compatriots.

Unfortunately, it's precisely this feeling of individuality that is lacking in Chinary Ung's *Tall Wind* (1970). Despite his first name, the 35-year-old Ung was, I gather, educated in the United States. His is, I must admit, a new name to me, and *Tall Wind* is one of just four of his works in the Peters catalogue. It consists of a vocalise which prefaces the settings of two of e.e.cummings' poems — *Sunset* ('stinging gold swarms upon the spires...'), also used by Berio in his *Circles* of ten years earlier) and *Sonnet* ('a wind has blown the rain away...'). For the most part the instrumental writing is conventional (little use of 'effects') and is based on a watery Boulezian idiom. The melodic athleticism and rhythmic fluidity is, however, not matched by the necessary balance of pitch control, and while Ung may be aiming at a quasi-Eastern drone in the repetitive heterophony, the circulation around limited notes in limited registers is quite at odds with the other aspects of his style. I also have a quibble to raise with Peters/Ung: nowhere is a guide to accidentals made explicit — in some cases they appear to apply only to the notes they preface, elsewhere possibly to the whole bar. This sort of oversight underlines the essential weakness of this score. The word-setting also is rarely more than ordinary.

Werner Heider is another name unfamiliar in this country, although the Goethe Institute's Exhibition called '28 Young Composers from the Federal German Republic', which has been doing the rounds in recent months, did give an opportunity to hear some of his music. (Incidentally, would the Arts Council not consider a similar project on young British composers and make a more thorough and informative show out of it?) Born in Bavaria in 1930, Heider has been the recipient of a number of German prizes and makes his living as a pianist, conductor and composer. His output covers solo works to music-theatre pieces, and *Stundenbuch* ('The Book of Hours') dates from 1972 on commission from St. Mathew's Church, Erlangen.

Heider describes in the preface how *Stundenbuch* may be seen as 'a series of meditative constellations'. As material he has taken a kaleidoscopic text by Eugen Gomringer consisting of 24 German nouns without capital letters and prefaced by 'mein' and 'dein' (geist, wort, frage, antwort, lied, gedicht, leib, blick, kraft, freude, trauer, schweigen, berkunft, anfang, weg, ziel, tod, traum, baum, blüben, gabe, haus, jahr, stunde). Although he goes on to talk about 'litany' and 'a return to pure essentials', the musical impression is one of archness and artifice, a poor man's *Stimmung*. It does share with the Stockhausen work both tonal stability (in Heider's case an intermittent D natural) and spatial grouping (in *Stundenbuch* the twelve singers are interwoven with the twelve instrumentalists around the perimeter of the concert area). But here 16-17 minutes is insufficient to set up the reflective atmosphere for which the composer is clearly aiming, and despite its careful structure and polychoral niceties *Stundenbuch* lacks the imagination of its predecessors in the field.

'Each day I would watch the landscape, its transformations ... and study Debussy's *Jeux*.' Thus Toru Takemitsu, the Japanese composer born in the same year as Heider, on his *Green* for orchestra. It's subtitled 'November Steps II', but bears little resemblance to the earlier composition (it does not include traditional Japanese instruments) except in the sphere of influence suggested by Takemitsu's comment. The French connection is strong, not only in the title's allusion to Verlaine, but in the deliberate recreation in Takemitsu's terms of the 'mystery of Debussy'. It's a short work (about six minutes, like the Ung), but a rare success, one in which the transparent Debussyian origins are sublimated to an imagination of a distinctly higher order than that apparently possessed by any of the other composers under consideration here. I'm not aware of any direct quotations, for Takemitsu has gone to the principles embodied in *Jeux*, not specifically to the musical ideas. So while *Green* favours instrumental textures such as divisi strings and rich woodwind colours, its abiding merit lies in the way in which the composer has achieved ebb and flow, seemingly organic growth as well as literal repetitions: qualities that still remain rather elusive in Debussy's *Jeux*, not to mention his earlier music!

NOTE:

¹In his review of five scores in *Contact 14* (Autumn 1976), p. 31.
²Available from PWM (Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne), P.O. Box 26, Warszawa, Krakowskie Przedmieście 7, Poland.