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

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

Citation

Montague, Stephen. 1979. 'Review of *Notation* by Virginia Gaburo'. *Contact*, 20. pp. 30-31. ISSN 0308-5066.



NOTATION by Virginia Gaburo
Lingua Press, 1977 (\$13.95).

Obtainable from P.O. Box 1192, La Jolla, California 92308,
USA

STEPHEN MONTAGUE

Lingua Press began a couple of years or so ago in La Jolla, California, with the issuing of Collection One, a beautifully printed collection of 40 works by Kenneth Gaburo, one of America's most interesting composers and the director of the excellent extended vocal techniques ensemble, NMCE IV. Collection Two has recently become available, and contains some 38 works by other interesting composers, writers and artists, primarily American, who as yet are not well known in Britain. One of the works available in this latest series is Virginia Gaburo's book *Notation*, 'a lecture to be performed by solo speaker to attentive audience'.¹

Virginia Gaburo holds a B.A. in literature and a Masters degree in piano performance from the University of Illinois and has been active for many years as a soloist and ensemble performer in North America. She has recently made a recording of contemporary piano music (issued in the autumn of 1978 by Lingua Press) and, in addition to her book on notation, is the author of a forthcoming volume entitled *Who is Bruce Simonds?*

Notation (now available from Lingua Press by direct order) is one of the results of Virginia Gaburo's experience as a teacher and performer, grappling first-hand with this thorny subject in both contemporary literature and earlier music. The book is the handsomely printed text of an illustrated lecture/performance first given by her in 1977 at the San Diego State University before an audience of musicians. The book contains instructions for the 'performance' of this interesting lecture, including the making of slides for both the verbal quotations and the musical examples sprinkled throughout the text. Both as a book and as a lecture/performance it is an attractive presentation. The author approaches the difficult subject methodically and with a good deal of insight in her attempt

both to qualify and to expand the concept (one holds) to be represented by the word notation'. The lecture unfolds in a kind of dialectical manner, carefully picking its way through many interesting and provocative areas such as analogies between music as a communication and verbal language, attempts to define 'Western art music', improvements to the communicable ability of notation, historical problems in notation, the expansion and flexibility of the term 'notation', notational innovation and standardisation and a performer's view on notation. The lecture concludes with a nice touch when a slide of a planet in deep space is projected while a pre-recorded excerpt from Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* is played.

On the whole *Notation* is effective, stimulating and certainly provides many points for audience discussion, one of which might be the whole idea of a performer (speaker) presenting someone else's thoughts on a subject in a kind of mixed-media theatre environment. What I found a little difficult as I read the text was the density and sometimes complexity of the material and ideas which the author presents in a rather brief space of time. This, coupled with many wonderful, pithy quotations inserted at the appropriate points in the text, sometimes made the book more difficult to grasp than if it were read straight through without the quotational sidetrips. I liked both very much, and that was the problem. Each really necessitated contemplation and a different period for thought processing. The advantage of reading the book is obvious. In the live lecture presentation, pacing would undoubtedly be of the utmost importance.

I was surprised that, since this work is presented both as a book and a lecture, there were no references for most of the verbal quotations. This seems to me a real oversight on the part of the author. Take, for example, Cage's lovely definition of notation: 'The omission of all that one's familiar with (compare conversation among old friends)', or Stockhausen's wonderfully narcissistic: 'I think the ultimate goal of a creative person is to transform his whole existence as a person into a medium that's more timeless, more spiritual. . . I'm commissioned so to speak, by a supernatural power to do what I do.' Either of these quotations might surely prompt some people to further reading or perhaps even to investigate its context. Nevertheless these are only minor points. *Notation* is a different look at a familiar term, and in both forms, book or lecture, it has much to offer. It is certainly recommended for live performance, private study and the libraries of musicians, music colleges and universities in English speaking countries.

NOTE:

There will be further reviews of Lingua Press material in future issues of *Contact*. (Ed.)

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