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9TH DUBLIN FESTIVAL OF 20TH-CENTURY MUSIC
5-12 JANUARY 1982

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Among all the prestigious 20th-century music festivals, *Contact* readers should be reminded of the handily placed Dublin Festival held every second year in January. It features, of course, Irish composers, but also programmes other 20th-century works and usually invites a visiting composer as a focal point. These have included Elliott Carter, Lutosławski, Messiaen, and Maxwell Davies.

The ninth festival, which had secured a visit from Stockhausen, was, however, beset with problems. Firstly, extra rehearsals for Stockhausen's *Inori* necessitated starting the festival a day early (!), and secondly, and disastrously, there was a heavy snowfall after two days of events. Dublin authorities are quite unused to coping with snow that doesn't disappear overnight; no-one could get in or out by road, rail, or air for most of the rest of the festival, and few could even get from the suburbs to the concerts.

As I had prudently arrived before the snow and positioned myself in the nearest hotel to Trinity College, where the concerts took place, I was one of the few visitors who witnessed the whole festival. It is the first Dublin Festival I have attended and I could hardly judge the normal atmosphere from such adverse conditions: but it did seem to me that although there was evidence of a warmth of feeling for the festival among the natives, it needs a social centre and a few more events such as lectures, discussions, films, or exhibitions if it is to engender enough of a festival spirit among visitors.

It was a dreadful shame, however, that the Stockhausen events were reduced: the Kontarsky brothers didn't get further than Heathrow with *Mantra*, and in the end the Radio Telefis Eireann Orchestra's rehearsal time for *Inori* was so disrupted that its performance had to be abandoned. Stockhausen charmed a comparatively large audience with a talk on *In Friendship*, played by its dedicatee, Suzanne Stephens (clarinet), and again in his introduction to a taped performance of *Inori* with only the lighting and the mime artists for real. (I discovered later that word had gone around elsewhere that the orchestra had sat on the stage and mimed their parts. But no, this delicious idea did not happen.) In spite of an awful tape made from the recording of the work, its mesmerising power came across, and Stockhausen then 'gave us a present' of a live performance of the 'Aries' movement from *Sirius* by Markus Stockhausen (trumpet) with its proper and very well-made tape accompaniment.

Only one other concert in the festival was cancelled, so nearly all of the Irish works were heard. The festival organisers would do well to review their policy (if they have one) of what to programme with the Irish music — it did seem rather haphazard. Two of the concerts that particularly impressed me were one of chamber works by Schoenberg and Webern by the Arditti Quartet and a demanding piano recital by Philip Martin which culminated in a revealing performance of Ives's *Concord* Sonata. I was also impressed by the standard of playing of the New Irish Chamber Orchestra which opened the festival with a concert including three new Irish works, two receiving their premières.

Of all the music by Irish composers that I heard (including nine premières) nothing really stood out for me, though nearly everything was well written and technically assured. A Violin Concerto by John Kinsella reverted to Baroque principles in its scoring but Romanticism in its language. This was commissioned by the New Irish Chamber Orchestra as was John Buckley's Concerto for Chamber Orchestra, a work full of interesting ideas and attacked with evident pleasure by the orchestra but disappointing *in toto*. The song cycle *A Penny for a Song* by Nicola LeFanu (who claims Irish connections) was written for Penelope Price-Jones (soprano) and Philip Martin (piano) and given its première by them in a wintry atmosphere that suited some of its poems. Not a very deep work, but its simplicity and clear lines held one's attention. There was one festival commission, which went to the Northern Ireland composer David Byers for a string quartet. Not at all daunted by his august bedfellows, Schoenberg and Webern, in the Arditti Quartet programme, he contributed quite a taut and well-argued piece, *At the Still Point of the Turning World*, with only a few derivative idioms, such as Bartókian sliding fifths, that jarred.

A concert by Gerald Barry and Kevin Volans of works by Cage, Kagel, Gerhard Rühm, and themselves was a welcome antidote to the rather serious nature of the rest of the festival. Gerald Barry, who has been studying with Kagel and working in Germany, has decided to return to Ireland to live. He may supply a stimulus that young Irish composers need.

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