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ISAM Monographs

Richard Jackson, *United States Music: Sources of Bibliography and Collective Biography,* ISAM Monographs, 1 (New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 1973; second printing, with corrections and additions, 1976)

——, *U.S. Bicentennial Music I,* ISAM Special Publications, 1 (1977)

Bruce Saylor, *The Writings of Henry Cowell: a Descriptive Bibliography,* ISAM Monographs, 7 (1977)

Vivian Perlis, *Two Men for Modern Music: E. Robert Schmitz and Herman Langinger,* ISAM Monographs, 9 (1978)

Sherman Van Solkema, ed., *The New Worlds of Edgard Varèse: a Symposium,* ISAM Monographs, 11 (1979)

Richard Franko Goldman, *Selected Essays and Reviews, 1948-1968,* edited by Dorothy Klotzmann, ISAM Monographs, 13 (1980)

The Institute for Studies in American Music, under the direction of H. Wiley Hitchcock, has no exact British counterpart, yet its success and the value of its publications (including a popular and racy newsletter) should be the envy of our diminishing universities and dull academic societies. The beautifully, and cheaply, produced paperback volumes, some 18 in all since the Institute's inception in 1971, seek, according to the publicity leaflet, 'to fill the need for publication of scholarly studies, essays and basic reference works . . . that are longer than article-length, shorter than full-scale book-length, and unlikely to find publication through normal commercial channels'. The consistent quality of these monographs proves that an imaginative lead can produce authoritative and yet eminently readable studies, while the established publishing houses, cowering with recessionitis, give us extortionately priced tomes, or more synthetic 'concise histories of' and descriptive 'introductions to' than we really need.

The scope of the Institute's research is much broader than America's brief musical history might suggest: aspects of popular black and white musics, 19th-century liturgical music, and art music have been covered. Another project under the Institute's direction is the Recent Researches in American Music series of musical editions, published by A-R Editions of Madison, Wisconsin, in which the first two volumes are an *Anthology of Early American Keyboard Music 1787-1830,* edited by J. B. Clark (1977).

The reference works are not purely lists of source material but have descriptive text abstracts for each entry, often, as in the case of *The Writings of Henry Cowell,* using sentences from the original work. Cowell was always an enthusiastic and outspoken advocate of the 'ultra-modernists' (an article in *Musical America* (January 1925), p.9, is entitled 'Modernism Needs No Excuses, Says Cowell'), but what Bruce Saylor's bibliography interestingly reflects is Cowell's adoption during the thirties of a more modal and exotic sound-world, with fewer of the earlier radicalisms; this resulted from his passionate and informed interest in ethnic music, fostered by his study of Oriental music and comparative musicology in Berlin and his contact with folk music, particularly that of Eastern Europe, while on concert tours. His later music shows the same eclecticism as do the subjects of his nearly 200 articles, but he was not an intellectual magpie, picking and skimming through second-hand knowledge; as Richard Franko Goldman says in his tribute 'Henry Cowell 1897-1965: a Memoir and an Appreciation' (no.13, p.202):

> What Henry learned or experienced went into music and not into documents; it became part of himself rather than part of an archive. Henry exemplified the important difference between learning things and studying them, or being taught them . . . he did not read about the *shaku-hachi* or the nose-flute; he learned to play them.

The ISAM's first monograph, Richard Jackson's excellent *United States Music: Sources of Bibliography and Collective Biography,* categorises items as reference, historical, regional, and topical works, the last ranging from 'Country and Western' to 'Women in Music'. Jackson's annotations are informally informative and sometimes honestly dismissive: for example, of entry 82, Edwin Barnes's *American Women in Creative Music* (Washington, 1936) he says, 'As opposed to women in the uncreative kind? Trashy pamphlet useful only as a source of names for further research.' Jackson's *U.S. Bicentennial Music I,* a list of music that appeared mostly between 1973 and 1976 specifically to celebrate that event, is of less interest for British readers but does contain a useful section giving publishers' addresses.

The three non-reference monographs all make fascinating reading, but the jewel among them is clearly Richard Franko Goldman's *Selected Essays and Reviews, 1948-1968.* Goldman lived for most of his life in New York, teaching at the Juilliard School and conducting his father's outdoor concert band, but he is known in Britain primarily as a contributor to the *Musical Quarterly*. He died in 1980, just a few days after this book went to press.

What characterises Goldman's writing is a dedication and commitment to modern music, which he discusses with the intellectual penetration and artistic integrity considered the norm in the best commentaries on older music. Goldman's message throughout these pages is one of an uncompromising seriousness of idea, which allows him a keen and often wry sense of humour: 'Seriousness is not the same as earnestness, of which there is plenty; the relation is that of jargon to idea.' (p.1) He has nothing but contempt for the 'culture industry' and its trivialisation of art through marketing, publicity and the like:

> The machines—radio, film and phonograph—seem to make art accessible and easy; they affect music in a special way, and reduce it, in a sense, to a species of useful noise. It would be false to say that music does not have a place in society today: it exists, if nothing else, to feed these machines, and to prevent silence. [p.2]

This was written in 1954 and, with mindless pap a growth industry, is even more valid today.

But Goldman is not always wildly enthusiastic about every aspect of the avant garde and he does not, like many critics today, remain non-committally on the fence about works he honestly doesn't like. He does have his particular loves: Carter, Dallapiccola, Wallingford Riegger, and, surprisingly, Barraqué. Of Barraqué's *Séquences* he says:

> the work has power, intensity, and contrast . . . The opening sections . . . are . . . the most beautifully imagined sounds since the opening of *Canti di prigionia* [by Dallapiccola]. They are a far cry from the cute nonsense of Berio or the mindless pounding of the red-blooded American school. [pp.148-9]

Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* fares less well: 'it is indecisive stylistically and retrogressive esthetically' (p.179), and Berio's flute *Sequenza* is 'inconsequenzial' (p.183).

Three important issues frequently recur. First, the composer whose theories are more interesting than their realisation in music; second (and more disturbing), the composer who assumes that his grubby little ego is of concern to others (a Romantic throwback all too prevalent in the present neoromantic—I almost typed necromantic—climate); and third, highly systematised forms of analysis, about which Goldman has some cruel words to say, 'a rather small crumb, and, alas, usually a stale one' (p.118). In his discussion of Barraqué's *Séquences*, a work he considers to be of extraordinary technical interest without making these techniques the central issue, he says:

> One senses the ordering, as in all good music, but is not obsessed by it; it is a means rather than an end. Analysis can demonstrate it; but more important, the *effect* justifies the analysis. We have wasted a lot of time in the last few years . . . dissecting music already in an advanced state of decomposition. We have found out not what made it live, but merely the causes of its death. [pp.147-8]

In a general discussion of *Wozzeck* he states that some of Willi Reich's analyses, 'remind me of a meticulous description of all the parts of an automobile engine, [which] neglects to mention that gasoline is used to make it go' (p.157), a delightful crystalisation of the analyst's perennial problem.

For all Goldman's strictures on analysis his extended articles on Carter's music are disappointing: panegyrical, descriptive, and repetitive. Many of his comments are concerned with the usual problem of complexity and the justification of intellectualism in music. In 1951 he wrote:

> He [Carter] has had the reputation of being an intellectual composer with a gift for calculated complexity applied to a background of Boulanger and Piston, a composer of music never lacking in skill but sometimes ingeniously uninteresting. Such a reputation may, however, often be unjustly earned, and its origin, in an age like ours, is always

suspect as being the poverty and sloth that will prefer dogmatic simple-mindedness on all counts. [p.69]

This is a thoughtful and entertaining collection of writings which hardly show their age; as Elliott Carter says in his Foreword, 'One wonders how much of what is being written at present will stand up so well in ten or twenty years.' (p.ix)

Briefly, Vivian Perlis's *Two Men for Modern Music* is a fascinating story of two little-known champions of new music: E. Robert Schmitz (1889-1949), a French pianist – conductor pupil of Debussy, who performed works by Schoenberg, Ravel, Prokofiev, and others in the States after emigrating there in 1918; and Herman Langinger (b. 1908), an Austrian who became the engraver of Cowell's journal *New Music* and works by Ives, and was a friend of Schoenberg.

Sherman Van Solkema's *The New Worlds of Edgard Varèse* had its origin in a symposium, with major contributions from Carter, Chou Wen-Chung, and Robert P. Morgan, and a final open discussion. Carter's short essay is introductory and a little vague: '[These] are the remarks of a composer and friend which make no pretense to musicological accuracy, since I have no time for research, and rely on memory and, I hope, as little fantasy as possible.' (p.1) Morgan's 'Notes on Varèse's Rhythm' usefully discusses the interrelation of rhythmic and pitch structures, with examples from *Hyperprism* (1922-3) and *Intégrales* (1924-5). Chou Wen-Chung, who studied with Varèse in 1949 and became a close musical associate, is the executor of Varèse's musical estate. His article, 'Ionisation: the Function of Timbre in its Formal and Temporal Organisation', is a thorough and lengthy analysis of the piece, which describes in some detail procedures common to much of Varèse's work; this could be a good starting-point for an undergraduate study of Varèse's compositional technique.

All in all an excellent batch of studies: university and college music department libraries should obtain the entire series if they haven't already.