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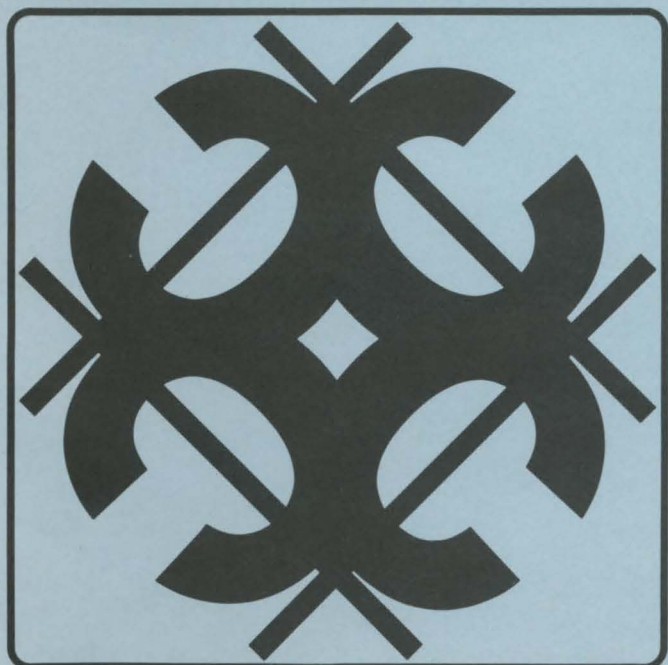
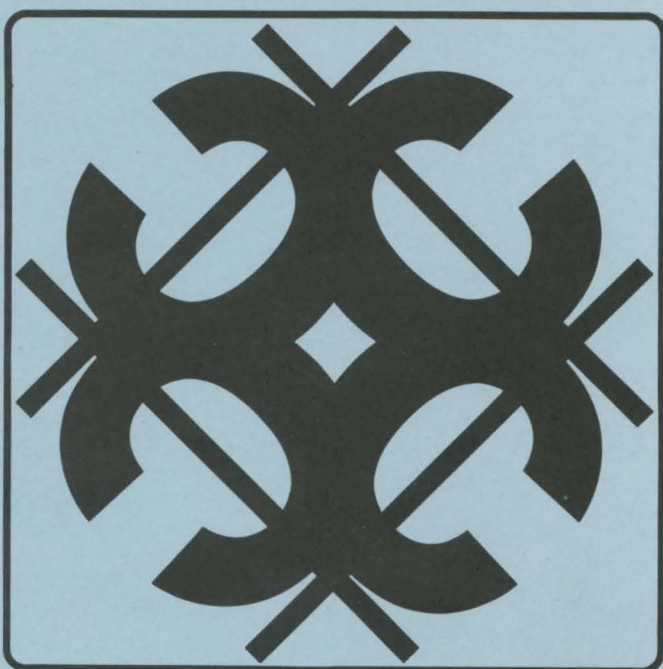
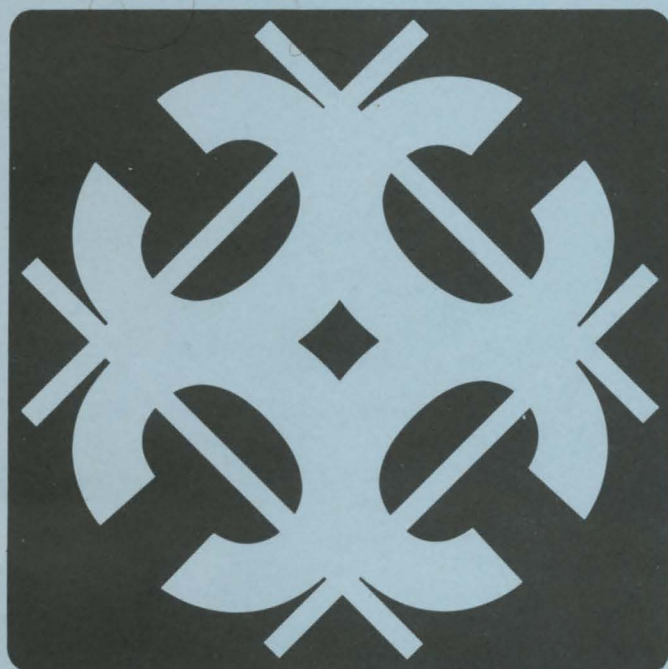
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Today's Music

No 21
Autumn 1980 60p/\$2



English experimental
music - 1:

John White and
Howard Skempton

Bead Records
Reviews and Reports

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- 17 Electronic Music Issue. Tim Souster on the history of Intermodulation, David Roberts on Hugh Davies, Simon Emmerson on Ring Modulation and Structure, Barry Anderson on the West Square, London, Electronic Music Studio. The Scottish Music Archive (Paul Hindmarsh).
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Faithful readers may have now come to *expect* to receive *Contact* annually rather than three times a year as formerly. We are, of course, sorry that our schedule has not improved since last time: the reasons are rather complicated and we've not got the space to detail them here, but suffice it to say that we *had* come up with a much better arrangement to get the magazine out on time, but that this fell through when one of our number got a job abroad. Meanwhile, another of our number has also been on the other side of the Atlantic for much of this year. We have gained a new member of the editorial team, Nick Barrett, to whom we extend a welcome: though *he's* recently moved to Paris for a spell! You'll see from this that involvement with *Contact* is enough to make anyone flee the country . . .

We are, however, currently in the process of trying (for the third time in the past year or so) to get *Contact* on a firmer footing. If it all works out, you should be receiving another issue before too long: it will continue this issue's theme of English experimental music with an article on Gavin Bryars and one by John Tilbury. Brigitte Schiffer's New Music Diary stretches back a long way in the present issue, though it's still highly selective of course: we intend to allow her to bring us fully up to date in the next issue, including a retrospective assessment of the MusICA and London Sinfonietta series of last season. Satie is thus postponed yet again, but some of the other promised material *will* find its way into *Contact* 22. And as we said last time, we trust that you'll keep reading!

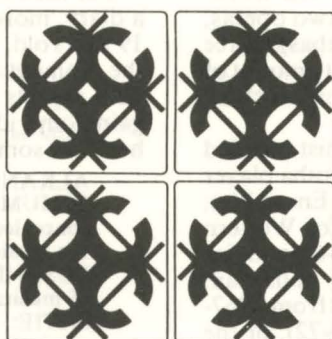
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No 21 AUTUMN 1980

Edited by Keith Potter, Nick Barrett, Hilary Bracefield, David Roberts, John Shepherd

ENGLISH EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC —1

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The Piano Sonatas of John White

This is the first of two articles in the first of two issues devoted particularly to English experimental music. 'Experimental', that is, in the sense defined by Michael Nyman in his now sadly out of print book Experimental Music: Cage and beyond: here Nyman contrasts the attitudes of certain American and English composers towards the materials of music and to the relationships between composer, performer and listener with those of European 'avantgardists' such as Boulez and Stockhausen. The latter seem concerned with personal expression and with the extension, if 'radicalisation', of previous modes of thought: towards the concept of an 'art object', for instance. Experimental composers seem more concerned with 'process' than with 'product', though that does not prevent them from writing (even, as here, fully notated) pieces of music, of course.

It may be argued that the term 'experimental' is no longer valid, or if it is, that it's already become more a historical tag (like 'baroque' or 'Romantic') than a living creative aesthetic. When, at the end of last year, I asked nine 'English experimentalists' for their views on the state of 'experimental music' as we moved into the 80s, one composer replied that he wasn't sure he knew what I even meant by the term 'experimental'. Certainly the works of

JOHN WHITE was born on April 5, 1936. His works include nine ballet scores, three film scores, two operas, two symphonies (one for organ and six tubas), three concertos and 98 piano sonatas as well as a vast amount of music for the composer/performer ensembles which he has initiated.

His musical experience includes that of: pianist (studied at the Royal College of Music from 1955-58); tuba player (from 1971-72 in the London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble); Musical Director in theatre and ballet (e.g. for Western Theatre Ballet in its early stages from 1958-60 and for *Canterbury Tales* from 1970-72); session musician; arranger; improviser (with Cornelius Cardew from 1967-69); member of the Scratch Orchestra (1969-72), of the Promenade Theatre Orchestra (1969-72; predominantly four toy pianos and/or reed organs), of a duo with Christopher Hobbs (1972-76; percussion duo, piano duet, piano and tuba, finally multi-instrumental) and of the Garden Furniture Music Ensemble (1977 onwards; multi-instrumental); teacher (of piano and composition to music students at the RCM from 1960-64 and at the Yehudi Menuhin School from 1974 onwards; of drama students at the Drama Centre, London from 1969-77 and at RADA from 1978-79).

A few words about the piano sonatas in general first of all. Two are published; five are recorded;¹ some are missing; most remain unperformed in public. Colin Kingsley, John Tilbury and Roger Smalley used to play a few, but the only pianist apart from the composer to have performed several is his long-time friend Ian Lake. These days White himself is far happier to assume the responsibilities of an ensemble player rather than those of a soloist. As a result of this, perhaps, he tends to view his solo piano music as being designed for performance at home to friends: a pity, since the cordial and generous nature of the music is communicated particularly well by his own playing.

¹For details see the end of this article.

the two composers that are examined in detail in this issue have apparently, with a few exceptions, little to do with the 'freer' approaches of Cage in the 50s and 60s or the activities of the Scratch Orchestra around 1970. But both White and Skempton were members of the Scratch Orchestra and the latter was one of its founders (together with the author of the article on him, Michael Parsons, and Cornelius Cardew, the 'father of English experimental music' who now, of course, holds very different views and writes a very different kind of music: see John Tilbury's article in the next issue for a statement from the 'political' vantage point). And both authors point out some of the aspects of an experimental attitude which are still to be found in their music and ideas right up to this day.

Scores of English experimental music are notoriously difficult to come by; it is partly for this reason that we have included a lot of music examples in the present two articles, including several complete pieces. For a wide range of English experimental music, readers are referred to the material in the Experimental Music Catalogue, obtainable by writing to Gavin Bryars, 208 Ladbroke Grove, London W11. In addition to the article by John Tilbury, Bryars will himself be the subject of an article by me in the next issue of Contact. (Keith Potter)

For their composer, White's 98 piano sonatas represent a diary, more or less continuous since 1956 when he was 19 years old, which not only records musical obsessions of the moment but also his 'enthusiastic absorption with aspects of 19th and early 20th century music'.² To gain some idea of whom and what he is talking about, here are some examples:

- ALKAN: The exposition of mysterious order
- SCHUMANN: The wealth of inner life half concealed behind the engaging and mobile nature of the musical patterns (*Kreisleriana!*)
- BUSONI: The masterful containing of a wide range of musical vocabulary, structure and resonance
- SATIE: The arcane charm of apparently simple musical statement
- REGER: The sympathetic ability to be simultaneously serious and lost
- SCRIABIN: The volatile and winged nature of the musical thought and its manifestation
- MEDTNER: The tactile fluency of piano layout and the intellectual fluency of thematic and structural organisation
- BRUCKNER: The dignity and magnificence of diatonic chord-progressions and unswerving metre³

White's remarks have little to do with musical 'language' as such and his sonatas are never concerned with intentional nostalgia, pastiche, satire or quotation. There are fleeting references of style, colour or gesture which, particularly in the more withdrawn world of the earlier sonatas, effectively conjure up an imaginary musical seance at which 'friends' of the composer make brief appearances. In the slow, mysterious finale of the

²This and all succeeding quotations not separately acknowledged were either written or spoken by John White during a long conversation with the author in April 1979.

³From the programme notes for the concert entitled 'Four English Composers', Purcell Room, London, January 5, 1974. (The other composers were Christopher Hobbs, Michael Parsons and Howard Skempton.)

15th Sonata (1962), for instance, the ghosts of Bruckner, Sorabji, Busoni, Reger, Satie and even Feldman seem to flash by, although the original inspiration was a Poulenc nocturne. But, as in Satie's music, what sounds familiar or reminiscent does so in an often fresh context. White leads

the listener away from what might have been thought of as the work's premises at its outset through areas which he would not have thought possible: the result is a surprising range of material within the movement's 23 bars (see Example 1).

Example 1. Sonata No. 15, third movement

SOLENNE [♩ = 66 - 69]

GRADUAL CRESCENDO TO

(WITH PEDAL)

POKE ON PIV HOTO

KER CRASH

Red

RIT.....?

SORT OF ROCKING GENTLY

KIND OF SORE

SOUND WITH THE PEDAL ON

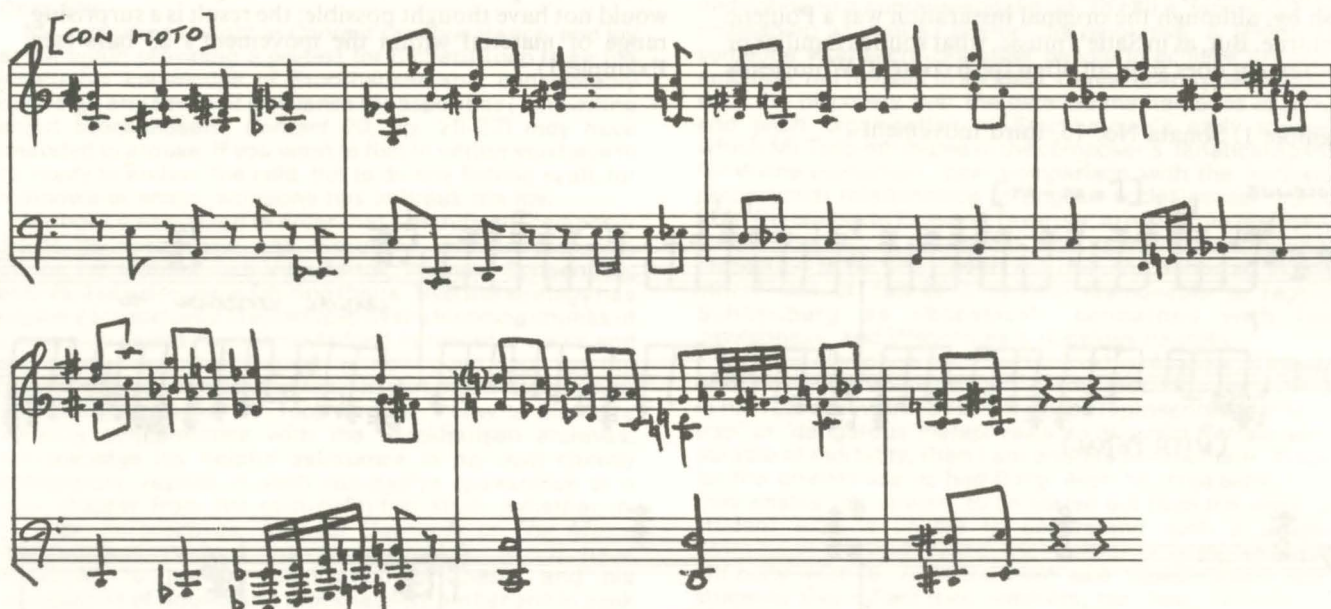
NON TROPPO LENTO (#)

VERY STEADY AND REFLECTIVE

IMPORTANT QUIET RACH CADENCE

FASTER THAN TEMPO 1 IF NECESSARY

Example 2. Sonata No. 15, first movement, bars 4-10



Other 'friends' of long standing include van Dieren, Fauré, Godowsky, Liszt, Frank Martin, Rakhmaninov, Sorabji and Szymanowski in addition to those listed above in White's programme note. Questioned about this apparently disparate collection of composers from the world of 'alternative' musical history, White pointed to various common denominators: the economic and concentrated way of viewing musical material, for instance, but also 'a practically physical predilection for a particular kind of sound and the extension and development of that sound. Whereas the Greats had a very objective way of extending or developing a theme or just one aspect of music, the composers I'm interested in had a way of patrolling the area they live in to make sure everything's all right. There's a particularly strong feeling of this in [Satie's] *Dances gothiques*.' And much British experimental music of recent years reflects similar concerns: perhaps one reason why the composers in question are united both in their support for Satie and (with the exception of Michael Nyman) in their indifference to Brahms.

It was not until he attended the British premiere of Messiaen's *Turangalila* Symphony in 1956 that White felt compelled to start composing:

All the arduous and scholarly aspects of composition which had been apparent to me before were swept away by the immediate delights of work within the chromatic modes (with their inbuilt choice of paranormal melody and harmony, or a more fragmented musical texture in which the most diverse elements could become related through modal exclusivity). Messiaen's rhythmic apparatus seemed infinitely liberating in that it contained the creative possibilities of the squareness of repetitive figures and the control of great rhythmic fluidity.

It is no surprise, then, to find that the three movements of White's First Sonata (a startlingly assured Opus 1 dating from the same year and the only composition for which he has ever written sketches) are heavily saturated with Messiaen-inspired rhythms and harmonies. But he

quickly freed himself from the modes as a result of becoming attracted to Schumann's 'disorientating diatonicism'. The Third (1958), Fourth and Fifth Sonatas (both 1959) adopt such a varied outlook that one would not guess they were by the same composer. These early sonatas indicate an increasing desire to establish musical continuity without relying on traditional ideas of design, contrast or even stylistic unity. The Fifth Sonata, a predominantly dark, introspective one-movement work, sounds like a succession of unrelated events, though White manages to maintain a high degree of surprise without resorting to rhetoric.

These early works seem much more private, distant and tonally confusing than those written in the 1970s. The intervening period witnessed neither a development in musical language nor an inclination towards more involved, technically complex works of greater length,⁴ but what Brian Dennis has suggested might be called 'a unique regression, a kind of anti-development... a gradual withdrawal from the world of accepted innovation. Gloomy bass lines, deadpan harmonies and obsessive ostinatos [replace] the richness of early works.'⁵ The anti-formal Fifth Sonata created an early landmark with its quantity of unlikely solutions, although White now views it as one of his more bewildering works. A more important landmark in terms of economy was No. 15, the opening of which presents a dry, arresting statement absolutely devoid of decoration or colour. Bars 4-10 (see Example 2) spotlight a deliberate tonal confusion of which Reger would have been proud.

⁴One exception to this, however, is the Eighth (and final) Sonatina (1961). Encouraged, no doubt, by Brian's *Gothic* Symphony and Sorabji's *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, it lasts about one and a half hours and consists of the following movements: Concert Allegro; two Andantes and an Adagio; two Barcarolles and a Barcarolle Recitative; Scherzo (c. 20'); Symphony in five movements (c. 30'); and Finale.

⁵Brian Dennis, 'The Music of John White', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 112, No. 1539 (May 1971), p. 435.

Example 3. Sonata No. 51, bars 1-3 (reconstructed by Michael Parsons)

The 15th Sonata becomes musically more obscure and elliptical as it progresses, each of its three movements slower than the previous one and as a consequence increasingly concerned with subtlety of resonance. The first movement exhibits a rather macabre revival of Busoni's 'renewed classicism'; the second, mysteriously subtitled 'Traumatic rural rape', features an obsessive 6/8 dotted rhythm and, fittingly, the only climax in the whole sonata; the spectral qualities of the third movement have already been commented upon.

After the 15th, an altogether more communicative work than the Fifth, the sonatas tended to become shorter and more compressed, a number of them consisting only of single movements. Leafing through White's manuscripts, my attention was drawn to the brief single movement of No. 26 (1965) which contains, surprisingly enough, an optional part for alto trombone. But the 'regression' referred to by Dennis was shortly to produce a work such as the 34th Sonata (1967), an astonishingly terse single movement characterised by motifs revolving around a few notes or up and down a scale or arpeggio, set against a bleak accompaniment often consisting of repeated notes or chords. The parts for each hand are often well differentiated in both rhythm and register: this reinforces the generally severe feel, as does the colourless harmony which displays a preference for diatonic discords and bare fourths and fifths.

It was around this time that White was working with Cornelius Cardew. This association provoked a considerable extension of White's 'lateral thinking': such works as the *Cello and Tuba Machine* of 1968, a kind of enormously long, slow-motion Bruckner, quickly established him as a leading light in experimental music — a position he has held ever since.

About ten sonatas (c. Nos. 42-52) reflect White's initial involvement with systemic music. At the time of writing, all but one are missing: the exception being No. 51 (1970) which has been reconstructed from a tape by Michael Parsons. All these sonatas were based on a numerical series derived from a chess knight's move across a square of numbers; the object was to come up with something satisfyingly unpredictable but with the possibility of involuntary repetition within it, thus avoiding the pitfall of serialism in which 'the quality of predictable change was predictable'.

In common with other systemic works of White's at this time (for instance, *Gothic Chord Machine* for four reed organs of 1969 and *Humming and Ah-ing Machine* of 1970), the 51st Sonata is based on an ascending progression of bare fourth and fifth chords, but 'these sonatas had some continuation of material that was more or less independent of the system so that one never got into the area of describing a number by means of pitch or duration'. In No. 51 (see Example 3) only the number of repetitions of each chord is governed by the system.

Although the range of historical reference to be found in many of his other works is largely absent from White's systemic music (apart from the pieces based on 'ready-made' material written for the PTO), the fondness in these sonatas for long sounds featuring bare fourths and fifths relates to Bruckner (rather than to La Monte Young): 'Hitting a resonance of primary colours — interest in that primary colour rather than in, say, contrapuntal felicities.' Similarly an attraction to the whole area of repetition in White's innumerable 'Machine' pieces derives more from Schumann and Alkan than from Steve Reich.

Early in 1972 White was touring North America with the London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble. The 53rd Sonata (reproduced in its entirety in Example 4) marked not only the composer's return to Britain after this tour but also a return to writing 'empirical', non-systemic piano sonatas. The next 37 appeared in rapid succession, Nos. 57-90 all dating from 1973. These are all one-movement works of about three minutes' duration. Compared with the earlier

sonatas they are shorter, warmer, altogether more direct and a good deal easier to play. Economy is still the order of the day, but the more expansive gestures contrast strikingly with the seclusion of No. 15 and the starkness of Nos. 34 and 51.

Talking about this group of sonatas, White drew a parallel with TV jingles: 'a very immediate communication in which there's minimal development of the situation. Facts are stated and left to mature in the minds of the audience.' Later he commented on the feeling of private research which composition had for him during the time when he was working in close collaboration with Cardew: a feeling that he had about experimental and systemic music generally. 'The further I got away from this, the less private the nature of the communication and the more necessary it became to account for why I was doing it.' Working in the theatre was another important influence in this respect: 'there's no programme note that's going to persuade the audience that what I'm doing is right or wrong. It's just got to work.'

Technically the 53rd Sonata reveals perennial characteristics. The harmonic progression is deliberately confusing in the early stages. The first 15 bars contain a number of major/minor third relationships between chords which result in unsettled tonality or unlikely modulation. The chords are largely triadic and root-based until the final section is reached: here the harmony becomes more chromatic although the tonality is more settled. Since there is nothing particularly striking melodically, the immediate focus of the sonata is on resonance; this also changes in bar 37, rich, semi-dark sonorities being replaced by 'pure white C major'. Continuity is preserved by consistent smoothness of line, the listener being led gently into an abrupt change of key, texture or, most importantly, colour. Conventional development is absent, but repetition of material often involves transposition and an additional small and unexpected variant: 'leaving areas open is important . . . otherwise the material restates something that's already been stated by a lot of composers'.

The 'one screw to be turned before the end' brings about a disruptive flattened fifth chord (bar 48). Discussing this chord in relationship to the surrounding material, White referred to the experimental world of Cage and others and in particular to an instruction in Cardew's *Octet 61* (see Example 5). The 'classical' counterpart to this would be Alkan's 'exposition of mysterious order': the surprises which occur in spite of (and because of) the strict discipline imposed, a basic example of which is given in Example 6.

Brahms would draw things to a satisfactory conclusion: everyone is comforted and made at home by means of the argument. With Alkan everyone goes home highly disturbed by the way the argument has gone.⁶

Unlike No. 53, many of the sonatas composed in 1972-73 are concerned with the extension of a single area of sound. Typical of these is No. 84, in which the first ten bars (out of a total of 35) are taken up with a left hand accompaniment figure in a warm, sonorous barcarolando. On its repetition, beginning at bar 3, it is joined by a high, slow, dreary scale successfully masquerading as a tune.

⁶One of White's least 'comfortable' works is the *37 Orchestral Snapshots* (1973). His only orchestral commission (from the Richmond Festival), it consists of brief extracts from the piano sonatas of 1972 and early 1973 separated by five to ten seconds of silence. For instance, the first four 'snapshots' are taken from the 53rd Sonata: no. 1 presents the opening three bars (on brass); no. 2 consists of bars 5-8; no. 3 of bars 16-17; and no. 4 of bar 37 to the end (woodwind and pizzicato low strings). Many of the extracts sound complete in themselves, even if unnaturally brief; the silences are formally logical but have quite a disturbing effect in performance. The strength of the contradictions (and the discomfort) is only possible within an idiom as accessible as White's.

Example 4. Sonata No. 53

CON MOTO

① *mp* (WITH PEDAL) DELIBERATE! (7)

⑤ *p* BUT SONOROUS LEGATISSIMO *mp* *p* (SONOROUS) PED

⑩ LEGATISSIMO *mp* *p* SONORO PED

⑮ *mp* *p* *low* DELIBERATE! NO PED. SUS. (1) PED

⑳ RH LEGATISSIMO *mp* NO PED.

24 *mp* *mp (SONOROUS)*

28 *LEGATISSIMO* *DELICATELY*

32 *mp*

36 *DELICATELY* *DELICATELY*

40 *DELICATELY* *DELICATELY*

44 *DELICATELY*

THORNTON RD
WITBLETON
14 APR 72

Example 5. From Cardew's *Octet '61*

↗ out, away; something completely different. This sign should be interpreted only once in any performance of the piece.

Example 6. Alkan: from Concerto for solo piano, Op. 39, No. 10, third movement

The image shows two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It contains several measures with notes and rests, and is annotated with 'p sempre stacc' and a bracketed instruction '[! = 100]'. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature, containing a series of eighth-note patterns. A '+8ve' annotation is written below the first measure. The second system also has two staves. The upper staff has similar notation to the first system, with a '*' symbol in the final measure. The lower staff continues the eighth-note patterns, with a '(+8ve)' annotation below the first measure.

The techniques involved in the systemically-organised percussion music which White was composing at this time are rarely in evidence in these sonatas. One exception, however, is the 59th Sonata, in which a repeated two-bar phrase gradually builds up, Rzewski-fashion, from a single chord into a sprawling and uncomfortable cadence. New notes and chords are added singly, and each phrase is stated four times before a new addition is heard.

White's experience in both experimental music and in the theatre seems to have encouraged a new confidence without which a work like the 76th Sonata, a punchy Alkanesque affair, would not have been possible. A permanent smile permeates even the quiet, sparse textures of No. 68 and the relaxed, velvety sonorities of No. 78, the latter being 'inspired by an account of the resident trio at the Pump Room, Bath'. These are areas in which an earlier sonata might have sounded secretive or withdrawn. In addition White's non-directional solutions, sometimes tending towards an agreeable cheekiness in previous works, become more capricious:

No. 67, for example, has a rather impudent little theme which reappears in several different keys; also many of these sonatas have what White has termed 'daft buggler' endings (another Busoni legacy). The heavy bass-register booming of No. 87 inspires an image of several lumbering, caber-tossing Scotsmen, the largest of whom inexplicably heaves his burden into outer space in the last bar (see Example 7).

The last three sonatas in this group (Nos. 88-90) are rather longer and more involved than the rest. No. 90, one of the most impressive of all, is a breathtaking moto perpetuo: a sparkling, concise evocation of the world of the Gothic horror story, with more than a suggestion of the diabolic.

Nos. 91-98, the most recent sonatas, develop the tendencies of the previous three. No. 91 (1975-76), described as 'a rondo with a finale in the English style', is an altogether more substantial and pianistically demanding work, easily breaking the five-minute barrier so common among its predecessors. White has, however,

Example 7. Sonata No. 87, last bar

The image shows a single system of handwritten musical notation for the final bar of Sonata No. 87. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps. It contains a melodic line with notes and rests, annotated with 'FREE TEMPO' and 'SONORISSIMO'. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature, showing a series of notes and rests. A '5' is written above the final note in the lower staff. A '7' is written at the end of the system. A '8ve' annotation is written above the first measure of the lower staff. The notation includes various symbols like 'LH' and 'RH' indicating hand positions.

made no sacrifices in economy in these latest pieces: the 93rd Sonata (1976) is a miniature sonata allegro containing 'semiquavers by the handful, an exploding chorale, a cadenza-like development section, a towering recapitulation and a codetina, all in the space of three minutes'.

These most recent sonatas are 'more to do with presenting a statement if not an argument': Nos. 97 and 98 (both early 1978) in particular are more conversational and pervaded with a breezy optimism worthy of Medtner. The vigour of Scottish loyalties is celebrated in the 96th Sonata (1977), one of White's most extrovert works to date: the performer is instructed that 'the general mood . . . should be one of beefy exuberance'. A brief extract demonstrates how these high spirits are assimilated into the established characteristics of White's compositional technique (see Example 8).

If the rhythms and chord repetitions of the more recent sonatas owe more to jazz and rock than to Messiaen, it is because White's range of reference has widened considerably since the initial involvements with experimental music and the theatre (and of course much more since his initial involvement with Messiaen). (One is reminded of the story about the Japanese monk, a vegetarian for years, who having attained satori eats whatever is put in front of him, even lamb chops.) This seems to have affected the ensemble music more radically. The piano sonatas provide the antidote, appearing at times when group activity is most slack and focusing on interests outside its scope. They are the only part of White's output for which no fairly immediate performance is envisaged; they therefore represent the least public face of a composer whose music has not, as yet, 'swamped our culture'.

⁷Told by Keith Rowe and related by Christopher Hobbs in the programme notes for John Tilbury's 'Volo Solo' concert series of October 1970.

Publications and recordings of piano sonatas

Nos. 1 and 5 are published by Alphonse Leduc, Paris; the British agents are United Music Publishers.

Nos. 1, 4, 5 and 9 were recorded by Colin Kingsley on Lyrita RCS 18.

No. 15 was recorded by Ian Lake on Music In Our Time MIOT/LP 1 (limited edition).

Publications and recordings of other works

Humming and Ah-ing Machine was published by *The Musical Times* as the Music Supplement to the May 1971 issue which contained Brian Dennis's article on the composer (see footnote 5).

The Experimental Music Catalogue published a number of works including *PT Machine* (1969). (For address see the general introduction to this issue above.)

Several works including *Drinking and Hooting Machine* (1971) are published in Brian Dennis, *Projects in Sound* (London: Universal Edition, 1975).

Air (1973) was recorded by the London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble as part of their 'Four Elements' record on DG 2530032.

Autumn Countdown Machine (1971), *Son of Gothic Chord* (1970), *Jew's Harp Machine* (1972) and *Drinking and Hooting Machine* were recorded by various musicians on Obscure Records OBS 8.

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Example 5 copyright of Hinrichsen Edition Ltd. and reproduced by kind permission.

The Music of Howard Skempton

SINCE 1967, when he first moved to London to study privately with Cornelius Cardew, Howard Skempton has pursued an even and consistent course in his music, focusing and refining his central concerns. His concentration on the quality of sound and his economy of means are already clearly evident in early works such as *A Humming Song* (1967), *Snowpiece* and *September Song* (both 1968) and *Piano Piece 1969*.¹ These piano pieces are predominantly static and without development, presenting in chance-determined sequence a limited number of carefully pre-selected notes or chords. The usual playing direction is 'very slowly and quietly', and there is little sense of forward momentum; each individual sound is allowed to resonate freely, and successive notes or chords are related to each other only by juxtaposition. There is a clear relationship with the earlier music of Feldman, but in Skempton's pieces the means are even more economical.

A Humming Song was actually written in April 1967 when Skempton was 19, a few months before he began studying with Cardew. It is for a pianist who is asked also to sustain certain notes by humming; this, incidentally, requires considerable control and relaxation and disproves the false notion that Skempton's music is always technically easy to perform. This composition is worth describing in some detail, since it uses methods which can be found in many of Skempton's other works. The sound of the piece was conceived statically, and may be described as a projection in time of different aspects of a single harmonic structure, consisting of eight basic pitches arranged symmetrically around the C sharp and D sharp in the central register of the piano, with intervals increasing outwards; the two central pitches are the ones that are hummed as well as played. There are also two auxiliary pitches, an octave above and below the highest and lowest of the other eight notes. This source material is never heard in its complete form. Six possible sounds were selected from it: a single note, two 2-note chords, two 3-note chords and a 4-note chord. Chance was then used to determine the order and number of occurrences of each of these six possibilities, within a total of 32. Whenever this procedure led to an immediate repetition of a chord including the highest or lowest note, the auxiliary note, an octave above or below, could be brought into play. There is thus already in this early piece a finely balanced relationship between chance and intuitive selection. The method of composition gives the music a rather loose and 'timeless' quality, drawing attention to the unique sonority of each note or chord as it occurs, rather than to the structure of the piece as a whole.

In *Waltz* and *Two Highland Dances*, both piano pieces dating from 1970, a more clearly defined metrical structure is introduced. In the *Highland Dances* there is a regular alternation of two 8-bar or 4-bar sections respectively, and in *Waltz* the four 16-bar sections of the piece are repeated over and over in predetermined

¹ *A Humming Song* and *September Song* are published in Howard Skempton, *Piano Pieces* (London: Faber Music, 1974); *Snowpiece* and *Piano Piece 1969* in EMC's *Keyboard Anthology* (London: Experimental Music Catalogue, 1972).

sequences. These pieces are tonally static: both of the *Highland Dances* have an open-fifth drone throughout, and *Waltz* has been well described by Michael Nyman as a paradigm of experimental flatness and uniformity.²

With *First Prelude* (1971) there emerges a more definite sense of harmonic movement. This is, however, always contained within narrow limits and is never allowed to achieve the dynamic, developing quality of a chord progression in traditional music. There is, rather, oscillation around a harmonic centre, focusing attention on it instead of using it as a point of departure or for dramatic contrast. The uniform repetition of each chord, which gives to this and similar pieces some apparent rhythmic momentum, is in fact used simply as a way of prolonging and emphasising the sonority. The same is true in *Quavers* (1972); here only four chord-types are used throughout, and while their succession and the number of occurrences of each type, within the total of 16, was again determined by chance, there is more harmonic cohesion within the material as a whole. In *Riding the Thermals* (1973) there are again only four chord-types, but variety of succession is guaranteed by the choice of six different paired sequences. All these piano pieces have the ability to illuminate their very limited chosen sound material from different angles, in such a way that in performance they give the impression of being much more varied and extensive than appears from the notation.³

In contrast with the more purely abstract pieces, there are other piano pieces which are more subtly evocative, seeming to make oblique reference to traditional procedures. Such is *One for Martha* (1974) with its unresolved tonal ambiguity, which hangs in the air like a prolonged moment from an imaginary late-19th century piano piece (see Example 1).

Quavers II (1974) (see Example 2) is again more abstract, dealing directly with the musical material as such. Here the full twelve notes are used; they are divided into four groups of three, which are combined to give four 6-note chord types. In this piece a more formal time-structure is created; it was determined that each of the four chord-types was to occur an equal number of times so that, while the succession was again determined by chance, the proportions were fixed and, given the limited possibilities, certain symmetries and regularities were bound to occur. The measured repetition of the dissonant chords creates a strong impression; as in the first *Quavers*, each chord is to be struck eight times, with the sustaining pedal held. Repetition is again used as a way of extending the chord, for long enough for the ear to grasp fully its

² *Waltz* and *Two Highland Dances* are likewise to be found in EMC's *Keyboard Anthology*; in addition, *Waltz* and *Snowpiece* are reproduced in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), pp. 145-146, in the course of his discussion of Skempton's music in the chapter 'Minimal music, determinacy and the new tonality'. See also Nyman, 'Hearing/Seeing' in the 'Art and Experimental Music' issue of *Studio International*, Vol. 192, No. 984 (November-December 1976), pp. 236-237, which again reproduces *Waltz*.

³ *First Prelude*, *Quavers* and *Riding the Thermals* are also published in the Faber collection of *Piano Pieces*.

Example 1. *One for Martha* for piano

Example 2. *Quavers II* for piano

rich sonority, but not long enough to allow one to lose one's bearings in the time-structure. The whole piece is contained within a strict framework of equal-length units and consists of layers of juxtaposed sound with clear stepped movement from one level to another. Because of its simple, symmetrical proportions, this piece has more formal definition than the earlier works, and the effect, within its brief duration, is one of monumental gravity and strength.

The static and unitary character of these pieces may be related at least partly to the influence of La Monte Young, whose music Cardew was enthusiastically propagating at the time when Skempton first came to study with him. In the late 60s Cardew presented performances of, among other pieces, *Poem, X for Henry Flynt* (both 1960) and *Death Chant* (1961); Young's work of the early 60s also featured prominently in Cardew's Experimental Music class at Morley College (1968-69) and in the early activities of the Scratch Orchestra (1969-71), with both of which Skempton was closely involved.⁴ The emphasis on a single type of sound, on drones, repetition and extended time-scales in the music of both Young and Terry Riley certainly had a decisive influence on the manner of performance as well as on the initial conception of Skempton's *Drum No. 1* (1969): 'Any number of drums.

⁴ See Dave Smith, 'Following a Straight Line: La Monte Young', *Contact 18* (Winter 1977-78), pp. 7-9, in the course of which *September Song* is again reproduced; see also Nyman, *Experimental Music*, op. cit., especially pp. 112-118 for a discussion of the Scratch Orchestra.

Introduction of pulse. Continuation of pulse. Deviation through emphasis, decoration, contradiction.' This was written as a direct, practical response to the situation in the Morley College class in 1969, when everyone was asked to bring a drum. There were widely varying degrees of musical experience and ability, and Skempton's text provided a central focus to which everyone could relate. One player would introduce and maintain throughout a constant pulse (MM. 120), which provided an essential point of reference for everyone else; the definition of the piece was clear but wide enough to embrace intentional and accidental deviations, and the more players there were taking part, the more dense and complex the sound would become. This piece soon established itself as one of the most useful and satisfying works in the Scratch Orchestra's repertory; performances often lasted an hour or more and were always full of interesting and unpredictable details.

The influence of Young may also be heard in two lengthy tape pieces which Skempton made at this time: *Indian Summer* (1969), which used wild crackling and feedback sounds produced with an erratic tape-recorder, and *Drum No. 3* (1971), made with an amplified scraped cymbal. In both of these pieces an intense involvement with deliberately abrasive, noise-like sound was evident. This is an interest which Skempton does not seem to have pursued further, though it may not be too far-fetched to relate to it his choice of the accordion, with its rather strident timbre and rough intonation, as his main performing instrument. In May 1977 he participated in

the Fluxus retrospective concert at the Air Gallery, London, performing as a single sustained sound on the accordion Young's *Composition 1960 No. 10*: 'Draw a straight line and follow it', in reference to which he also provided the following programme note:

'Draw a straight line and follow it' is simultaneously ascetic and hedonistic in character. It demands total commitment (c.f. "You've made your bed; now lie on it!"). The hedonism is reflected in the total suspension of time. We should define this music, not as 'organised time', but as 'borrowed time'.

to which he later added this further statement:

The power of music to inspire confidence is more than equalled by its ability to alleviate anxiety. Through music we are no longer manipulated by time. . . . We can stem the tide of time through the practice of repetition; or through silence, the last refuge of the fastidious.⁵

It is with Feldman's music, however, that Skempton feels a stronger affinity.⁶ He quotes a recent saying of Feldman's: 'For most composers, form follows function; for me, function follows form',⁷ and explains:

I take this to mean that there is no ulterior motive; the creation of form is sufficient. It's the purity that is so impressive . . . there's nothing extraneous. Every note, every rest is carefully weighed.⁸

If, in comparison with that of Feldman, Skempton's own recent music shows a more conscious concern with structure, it is because

Feldman is more organic, less subject to gravity; it's a different kind of power. I like a piece to have a strong foundation, to have its feet firmly on the ground. It's only by putting structure first that you can create something strong enough to survive.

Skempton's commitment to clear structural principles has been encouraged by a close association with visual artists working in the constructivist tradition. Since 1974 there has been mutual interest in each other's work and a fruitful exchange of ideas, notably with Peter Lowe and Jeffrey Steele, to both of whom Skempton has dedicated pieces, and with younger artists such as Trevor Clarke and Emma Park. Constructivism is concerned primarily with coherence, intelligibility and the clear definition of form; the aim is always to create perceptible inter-relationships within a defined field. Skempton refers in particular to the interdependence of structure and material which is an essential characteristic of constructivist work; the structural idea must be in complete agreement with the means of its physical realisation, so that they enhance and complement each other.⁹ He believes that there is a need for more emphasis on rationality:

Composing is thinking musically. If today's music seems less intelligent than it should, the composer's job is to restore the balance. This is why Bartók, Stravinsky and Webern are still so important.

⁵ Quoted in Keith Potter, 'New Music Diary', *Contact* 18 (Winter 1977-78), p. 49.

⁶ See Howard Skempton, 'Beckett as librettist', *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 25, No. 9 (May 1977), pp. 5-6, in which he writes about Feldman's one-act opera *Neither* and quotes from a conversation with the composer.

⁷ In conversation with Skempton, February 1979.

⁸ This and the following three quotations are from a conversation between Skempton and the author, February 1980.

⁹ For a more detailed account of the relationship between the English systemic composers and visual artists see Michael Parsons, 'Systems in Art and Music', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 117, No. 1604 (October 1976), pp. 815-818.

Among other composers whose work he admires are Gorecki and Xenakis, both of whom have a strong feeling for the objective physical nature of sound; and, a more conservative group, Malcolm Arnold, Britten and Shostakovich, whose craftsmanship and practicality he greatly respects. His own approach is summed up in the following statement:

Self-expression is not the aim. One looks out and responds to an external necessity, observing and discovering possibilities in the chosen material. The aim is to fulfil a need. One studies the technical properties of the instruments, the abilities and limitations of specific players, the amount of rehearsal time available, the place, the performance situation and potential audience; all these things determine the character of what is to be composed. The objective requirements are paramount. Once I know these things, the piece is there in all its essentials.

This objective approach does not mean that the music is lacking in expressivity. On the contrary, much of Skempton's music has an immediate attractiveness and engaging warmth. As with experimental music generally, however, the intention is that the expressive quality of the sound itself should be allowed to come into play. This lies in the nature of the musical material; intervals, rhythms and timbres have their own particular expressive characteristics and these are revealed rather than exploited.

Skempton's music takes a fresh look at some of the basic elements of musical language; scales, familiar melodic shapes and chords are often freed from their traditional associations and presented in a new light. A good example is the chromatic scale in the *Waltz* for piano mentioned earlier, which has none of the expressive implications of chromaticism in classical music. It is introduced here with surprising directness, simply as a new piece of material, a straightforward rising and descending line. Basic elements of this kind are used in all innocence of their conventionally accepted meanings, and what is sometimes mistaken for sentimentality or nostalgia is rather a recreation of something long taken for granted.

Semitonal movement occurs frequently in his music, both melodically and harmonically. Instead of being treated as a leading note, with implied harmonic direction, the semitone is used for what it literally is: a slight shift in position. In *First Prelude*, for example, the oscillation between E natural and E flat in successive chords recurs throughout, and in many other pieces movement from one chord to the next makes use of this kind of shift; *Quavers III* (1975) and *Air* for piano (1979) have bass lines descending regularly in semitones. The same kind of movement is prominent melodically in *Autumn Waltz* for two baritone horns (1976), in *Children's Dance* (1977) for accordion and piano and in the recent *Scherzo* (1979) for two horns. Another form of semitonal relationship is the simultaneous use of major and minor thirds, sixths or sevenths — the 'false relation' of English 16th century music — which is found in the accordion piece *One for the Road* (1976) and elsewhere. (See Examples 3, 4 and 5 for *Air*, *Autumn Waltz* and *One for the Road* respectively.)

In addition to the continuing flow of brief, concentrated piano pieces, Skempton's more recent work includes a number of compositions for percussion duo. These are demonstrative in character and clearly dictated by the extreme limitations of the chosen medium: two players each with one drum and one stick. Within these limits the various possibilities of pulse, repetition, alternation and cross-rhythm are explored. In the considerable number of short accordion pieces also, the instrument itself provides the inspiration. Some of these are straightforward melodies, with simple chordal accompaniment which arises naturally from playing a twelve-button accordion on which only six chords are available, all of them major triads. Particularly ingenious

Example 3. *Air* for piano

moderato

Example 4. *Autumn Waltz* for two baritone horns

$\text{♩} = 80$

use of the instrument is made in *One for the Road*, where a dense texture is created by the overlapping of notes common to keyboard and chord buttons. Melodic phrasing in these pieces makes use of the natural 'breath length' of the alternate in-and-out movement of the bellows, and in Skempton's playing care is taken to respect this break in the flow of air, instead of, as with most accordion players, to try and conceal it. The accordion pieces are very varied in character, ranging from the raucous fairground style of *Ada's Dance* (1971-75) to the sobriety of *One for the Road* and the grave formality of *Pendulum* (1978).

A number of works for orchestra must also be mentioned. There are three orchestral pieces dating from the period of the Scratch Orchestra: *Pole* (1970), *May*

*Pole*¹⁰ and *Movement for Orchestra* (both 1971), in which the material, again consisting of a limited number of chordal types in a chance-determined sequence, is presented in open score. The instruction is that each player should choose any one pitch from each chord and play it for any length of time, beginning within the duration of 20 seconds specified for that chord; notes of one chord may be sustained to overlap into those of the next. These works thus have the practical virtue of being playable by any instrumental combination; the indeterminacy of orchestral colour clearly leaves much to the skill and fine judgement of the performers. The willingness to let sound take care of itself in performance,

¹⁰ *May Pole* is published in the *Scratch Anthology of Compositions* (London: Experimental Music Catalogue, 1971).

Example 5. *One for the Road* for accordion

characteristic of the free-and-easy approach of the Scratch Orchestra days, may now seem somewhat optimistic, and it has been replaced by a more controlled approach in recent pieces. In 1978 Skempton made a fully realised version of *Pole* for nine instruments,¹¹ and he is currently (March 1980) at work on a new orchestral piece *Serenade*, in which the instrumentation will be fully composed.¹² This work reveals a continuing preoccupation with methods of composition established over the last 13 years: as in *A Humming Song*, all the pitch material is derived from a single harmonic source, with notes arranged symmetrically around a central axis; there are four chord types presented in a chance-determined sequence, and as in *Riding the Thermals* they occur in six ordered pairs so that certain connections are guaranteed. In the orchestration the aim will be, Skempton says, to use maximum variety of instrumental colour in trying to recapture the intuitive feeling of an improvised performance of one of the earlier orchestral pieces, but without ever obscuring the basic chord-structure itself.

The elemental simplicity and clarity of Howard Skempton's music belong essentially to the experimental tradition, which stands in sharp contrast to the dominant avantgarde tendencies. In an age in which musical significance tends to be associated with virtuosity and complexity, a music so devoid of drama and self-expression, so reduced to bare essentials and of such apparent technical simplicity may seem paradoxical. It may not always be evident from the economy of the notation how much skill, restraint and disinterestedness

are required to realise it successfully in performance. Nevertheless, its unpretentious strength and integrity provide a convincing alternative to the distracted novelties and emotional gesturings which are characteristic of so much contemporary music. It proposes a different set of values, both musically and socially.

It may, finally, be appropriate to call to mind these words of the sculptor Brancusi, with whose work Skempton's music seems to have certain qualities in common:

Simplicity is not a goal, but one arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself, as one approaches the real meaning of things.¹³

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¹¹ The version of *Pole* for nine instruments (flute, clarinet, horn, two guitars, keyboards, vibraphone, cello and double bass) was made in July 1978 for Douglas Young and an ILEA schools' ensemble.

¹² The orchestra for *Serenade* consists of piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, double bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba and strings.

¹³ Quoted in David Lewis, *Constantin Brancusi* (London: Academy Editions, 1974), p. 20.

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Two years ago I wrote a fairly extended review of the most recent records on the Incus label, founded by Derek Bailey and Evan Parker in 1970 and still going strong. This time — in an even longer review, for it deals with no less than thirteen discs and one cassette — it's the turn of Bead, a younger label that began operations in 1974 when the guitarist Peter Cusack and the clarinettist Simon Mayo got together to produce an album called *Milk Teeth* (an appropriate name, it appears, when you read their somewhat instructive account of the problems which face anyone starting a record label from scratch — to mix my metaphors) with, according to the sleeve, the dancer Shelley Lee.

In among our past record reviews you'll find a discussion of Bead's first two discs: for anyone who wants to follow up the leads from the present article, I've listed below all the reviews of improvised music which *Contact* has published.¹ Here I want to discuss the Bead output since then and up to the time of writing. If you want a fuller account of such things as the genesis of Bead, or further critical comment on the label's output — and in particular further information about the individual improvisers, the groups in which they play and the contexts in which they work — the rest of the footnotes to this review should give you some starting points. The now sadly defunct *Musics* magazine² will give you an even better idea of what has been going on, particularly during the mid and late 70s. A visit to the London Musicians Collective, or better still regular visits, will give you the best idea of all:³ though you should also keep an eye (I nearly said 'a beady ear') open for the deliberate 'infiltration of the more visible venues', i.e. the more 'classically' orientated halls such as the Purcell Room and St. John's Smith Square, if you want to catch all

the players and observe a very interesting, useful and indeed necessary phenomenon in contemporary free improvisation/free jazz, call it what you will — the refusal of at least some musicians (some of them very much involved with the Bead label) to confine their activities to the ghettos where they imagine most people think they belong (then most people *do*...). The quotation in that last sentence is from the bass player Tony Wren, involved with Bead from quite near its conception and currently its main administrator.⁴

There is, I think, a pretty generalised but still rather important distinction to be made between the kind of musicians to be found on the Bead and, most obviously and for comparative purposes most conveniently, the Incus label. I've already said that Incus was founded by Bailey and Parker: players of a certain age (around the 40 mark now, give or take a few years) who have certainly 'come of age' in terms of their improvising activities in what, for want of a better term, we tend to call 'free jazz'. This considerable experience stretches back roughly 15 years: to the mid 60s, anyway, if we're not to put too firm a date on it. From the present vantage point, their work, and that of musicians closely associated with them (Barry Guy, Paul Lytton, Tony Oxley, Howard Riley,⁵ Paul Rutherford, to confine the list to British players for present purposes) clearly takes on a pioneering quality. Free improvisation is scarcely generally accepted in this country nowadays, heaven knows, but 15 or even ten years ago Britain was a cultural desert as far as anything approaching a 'free music scene' was concerned: a few individuals, most, nearly all, of them based in London — and ultimately forming themselves into the London Musicians Co-operative (which the present Collective succeeded) — working in what must have seemed a

vacuum compared with the 'scene' in Holland, West Germany, Rome or in parts of the States. As far as Britain goes, and even in many respects as far as the world in general was going — for free improvisation out of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor (or to whoever you want to trace it . . .) was really pretty new anyway — these musicians represent a First Generation of improvising musicians of the free kind.

This term 'First Generation' applies more to the length of time a player has been working in free music as a main, or at any rate major part of his activity than to his actual age, it would seem. Guy, for example — perhaps the prime mover in the formation of the London Musicians Co-op as well as the London Jazz Composers' Orchestra (a somewhat irregular, ad hoc and none too accurately titled band which is still going)⁶ — is a good bit younger than, say, Bailey. (I find it mildly interesting that I know Guy's year of birth without looking it up (1947), whereas I've been unable to find Bailey's: composers seem to bother about such things far more than improvisers, or at least the Cultural System in which we all have to operate does, providing more means for the dissemination of such trivia — books, programme notes, *Contact* . . . — for those who write notes than for those who merely play sounds.) And there's something more difficult to pin down (and therefore more interesting) as well about this business of 'First Generation'. Of course there's a wide range of styles, manners of playing and attitudes to that improvisation, improvisation in general and even music in general among these musicians. But there's also something very hard to define that nevertheless *would* define them, if we could find the words, as a group: they do share, if not styles and manners of playing, then at least a corpus of attitudes to playing, to making music, to doing whatever it is they do. I'd hate to pin this down to just one thing, but a sort of common denominator which I found, and which might put some one who's not heard much, or any, of the music concerned on the right track towards a real understanding of what I'm getting at, is: virtuosity. Not the conventional, 'classical', scales-and-arpeggios type of virtuosity, necessarily; at least probably not. And not even a 'conventional' virtuosity of any kind (loud and fast as opposed to soft and slow, or at least soft and fast as opposed to soft and slow); at least not necessarily. It might be more a virtuosity of the mind than of the fingers (and I haven't got time to clamber out of Pseud's Corner to explain *that* properly, I'm afraid). But it's still virtuosity. Curt Sachs provides probably the main reason why most people think that some kind of virtuosity is necessary in instrumental music for it to be any good and in the process provides a better definition of it than I have.⁷

In the course of a very substantial introduction to the first seven Bead records, Kenneth Ansell provides not only the link between this and the matter of the playing on these discs (which it is my firm purpose to examine in just a minute), but a stab at defining the difference between the music of the First Generation players who largely dominate Incus and that of the Second Generation players who are to be found on Bead. 'Bead Records,' he writes, 'has become the focal point for recordings of the second generation of British free improvisors. By comparison with that of the first generation the music of the musicians we shall look at here operates within a concentrated and compressed dynamic range. Having disregarded the more extrovert and aggressive side of free music has not emotionally disembowled the music though: within the detailed intricacies and subtle interplay captured here is a wealth of emotional responsiveness and expression. Within its natural parameters it is both diverse and articulate. Once the listener assimilates the language adopted here he will find as much variety of expression as in their more volatile counterparts.'⁸

Now an important implication in what Ansell is saying seems to me to be that we should not expect the music on these Bead records to be all soft and slow, any more than we should expect that on most of the Incus records to be all loud and fast. Its 'natural parameters' cannot be defined quite so simply or simplistically and the 'detailed intricacies and subtle interplay' go much further than merely the tying of filigree knots or fancy pattern work done sotto voce rather than at the top of one's voice (and often at the extremes of one's range). But if you want a reasonably clear, probably the clearest, example of the qualities to be found in Second Generation improvisation, try either Bead 6 or 8 first.

A similar situation arises with Bead 6 as with Bead 1: a

third performer is credited on the sleeve whose contribution, because of its more visual nature, is somewhat difficult to detect on the record itself. While it doesn't appear that the dancer Shelley Lee had anything to do with Bead 1, the performance artist Nestor Figueras *can* be heard on Bead 6: at least there are quite a lot of sounds on the record which he *could* have made, even if they were actually made by David Toop's mainly flute-type instruments or Paul Burwell's mainly percussive ones. Figueras' contribution (described as 'movement/respiratory and vocal sounds/body percussion') and the confusion of roles, which results not only from the kind of work which the 'musicians' on the record do but also from the fact that the recording is taken from a live performance, illustrate well some of the qualities to be found in Second Generation improvisation. The visual element is sometimes very important: I wasn't at the concert at Action Space in London on April 1, 1977 from which this recording was taken, and I'm sure I'd hear it a different way if I had been. And there's also a quality in this performance which is more important than the merely visual impact of essentially aural events, but which is harder to define: perhaps one might call it a kind of 'ritual theatre'.

It's this ritualistic, I'm even tempted to say religious, approach to performance which makes the work of all these three so individual and frequently so compelling. And it's not entirely typical of all Second Generation improvisation: how could it be? Indeed on listening to the record I was struck first by how different it was from the others I had been listening to, in numerical order, up to that point: I jotted down such things as 'less musical or at least less to do with music', 'less to do with any known kind of musical continuity', 'yet it is still "extraordinarily musical"'. Not much help, perhaps. Especially when the imagination is prone to playing tricks on the listener because it's forced into such a prominent position when listening to Bead 6: not only because you have to try and think yourself into the situation of the concert (what was going on visually? what was the atmosphere like? — though some of the latter does come across), but also because the sense of musical time demands some getting used to, and when you've succeeded to some extent, the music's spaces allow lots of room for the imagination to manoeuvre. But it's the best I can do for now.

One of the difficulties with this kind of music arises naturally, I'm afraid, from its apparently almost 'esoteric' qualities. It *is* new, it *is* different and it's undoubtedly not for everyone. Because of all this, it's even more prone than most free music (most contemporary music generally?) to charges of spuriousness and pseudeury, and this becomes a particular problem when anyone comes to write about it. I'm not just using this as an excuse for incoherent or purple prose. I find it difficult enough to write about this music as it is, but I have to admit that, with a few exceptions, I find the writing of others about it, particularly some of those involved in this kind of 'religious' approach, quite baffling. I give details of two examples below: one⁹ which I quite fail to understand; the other¹⁰ which, though it contains passages of incoherence, should be read as a whole as an interesting attempt to relate some of the concepts inherent in 'slow music' of this kind to a thesis concerning the derivations of Western composed and notated music in vocal rather than instrumental music in ways which are interestingly different from, as well as related to, some other approaches to this complex subject.¹¹ This latter article, by Peter Riley, includes a review of Bead 6 as well as other records, including more composed music by, for example, John Cage and Alvin Curran: composers who, unusually, seem to mean a good deal to at least some of these Second Generation improvisers.

Like Bead 6, Bead 8 consists of two side-long takes from a live concert given by a trio of Second Generation musicians. As with Toop and Burwell, I have heard two of these players — Clive Bell and Colin Wood — live and know them to some extent as well as their music (I believe they play quite often together, but I've never heard them together before). Like Toop, Bell is a flautist with a deep interest in the music of the East: he has taken the study of it seriously enough to spend some while in Japan recently learning to play the shakuhachi, which he plays on this record in addition to the Western concert flute. One of the most memorable aspects of Bead 8 is some very expressive shakuhachi playing from Bell.

In some ways the music from this trio is more

'traditional': if that word means anything, which I suppose it doesn't unless I define what 'tradition' I'm talking about — that would be hard. So what *do* I mean? Warm, romantic even, a feeling for texture and timbre that is, however, never at odds with a balanced formal design. And perhaps that design is part of the 'traditional' feel of this music: it's almost too balanced and formal, 'calculated', dealing in graceful emotional curves that at times don't sound so much improvised as composed (something which can only rarely be said of Second Generation improvisers, more often of First). When I got on to the second side I suddenly realised what this seductive mixture of West and East, the oriental tracery of the shakuhachi, the warm, resonant and also at times eerie cello and Bernard Watson's evocative use of the inside of the piano as well as the keyboard, what this freedom within apparently well-defined limits reminded me of in terms of Western composed music: George Crumb.

It must already be evident from what I've said about these two discs that it's neither possible nor probably desirable to pin down these Second Generation improvisers into a narrow conformist format: in some ways what started as 'rule' has already proved to be 'exception'. No matter: I didn't intend the definitions to be either rigid or even very lasting — but they might prove useful as scaffolding for discussion. Let me now take up another line about these musicians which will probably waver just as easily: the 'problem' of 'technique'.

There are clearly considerable differences of opinion among improvisers themselves as well as among those who listen, or don't listen, to them as to what technique is necessary in their particular case, or even as to what technique *is*. Some musicians of both the First and Second generations got together a while ago and recorded a discussion about it and published the result.¹² It certainly shows up differences in the attitudes of the First and Second generation musicians which are in part, of course, bound up with the question of virtuosity which I mentioned earlier. You would expect a Bailey or a Parker to have an attitude to what constitutes technique which is, to put it no more precisely, nearer to that of an 'avantclassical' player such as Vinko Globokar or Michel Portal: neither of these European musicians has an exactly 'conventional' attitude to such things anyway and both have considerable experience as free improvisers; but both also play fiercely virtuosic composed music and Globokar composes it as well. Toop or Wood — or, to take a somewhat different case which I'll come to in a moment, Steve Beresford — don't feel the same way about these things. And this, among other factors, leaves them wide open to criticism on this level as well as on others: 'Another annoyance of the series was the attitude of Paul Kelly, the recently appointed Jazz Centre Society representative in the Midlands. Even though his office is in the same building, and one concert could have been attended during office hours, he showed no interest either. When asked (not by us) if he was planning to come, after some humming and hawing, he is alleged to have said, "I'm not interested because many of the second generation haven't proved their technical ability to the critics". This is certainly the oddest reason for not going to a concert that I've ever heard, if not the stupidest. I hope that such a comment only represents his attitude to this particular group, not to improvised music in general.'¹³

Now on one level this is merely all good partisan stuff: and the protagonists can speak up for themselves if they wish to. (*Musics* points out, by the way, that Kelly is involved in setting up a Southern Improvisation Circuit to enable groups to tour Southern England on a fairly sound organisational and financial basis, so the above should be read in the light of this.) At the same time I think there are several points which are relevant here:

- (1) Even allowing for the partisan nature of much comment, especially in letter or off-the-cuff form, concerning music of all kinds, there is a considerable discrepancy between what some musicians are doing, or at least what they *think* they're doing, and what even some seasoned, even 'professional' listeners think they're doing.
- (2) This manifests itself more in the case of Second Generation improvisers than First, which must be partly due, at least, to the differences I've tried to illustrate above.
- (3) The question of 'technique' is a stumbling block here because different people mean different things by it, and different people place different values on even the specific techniques over which they can agree identification.

Since there's no agreed yardstick by which we can measure 'technique' in free music any more than there's one for 'inspiration' in any kind of music, the argument is likely to be extremely inconclusive. However, let me put an end to this one by discussing the technique of two of the musicians I've already mentioned. Wood has an enviable 'classical' technique by, I should have thought, anyone's standards (I've heard him play quite a bit of notated, composed music — Purcell, salon and 'revue' type music — on several occasions). Toop is a very fine flautist by my standards: he has agility and good intonation if he wishes to use them; he must have perfect pitch because he picks up pitches consistently and quickly in ensemble music, again if he wishes to. I've heard that he can't read music: it surprised me, but I've deliberately refrained from tackling him on the subject because I think the answer would be irrelevant to my understanding of the term 'technique' in terms of the kind of music he plays — if he wanted to learn musical notation, I'm sure it would be a simple matter for him.

Beresford can certainly read music (and I can prove it), but if anything his relationship to such 'conventional' concepts as technique is much more oblique than Toop's. In some respects he's quite clear and leaves himself wide open to the criticism quoted above (he was a member of the group to which Kelly was referring): 'Well I'm a failed classical pianist and I'm a failed jazz pianist, basically . . . I'm not good enough. I just don't have the technique to be a good classical pianist. I don't have the commitment to jazz to go out and learn the 400 standards that you need, and also think it's primarily an American music. I mean, I failed consciously in a way, but not in another way. But at the same time I practise at the piano. Ideally I'd like my performance to stretch from completely uncontrolled to completely controlled as well.'¹⁴

This is where it starts to get complicated. Beresford is interested in lack of control and he concedes that this makes him very different from the First Generation musicians who 'would not be into lack of control at all. Because they just see improvisation as being orientated around the instrument, about learning to play the instrument and extending instrumental technique.' At the same time he's also interested in complete control and thinks that 'once you get to a certain stage, you can definitely learn more by just refining your technique rather than by tying yourself up in knots and trying to play'. This is nevertheless practically what he does on occasions, and it's not hard, having seen him play, to understand how several First Generation musicians who were in Bailey's chameleon-like Company with Beresford a couple of years back¹⁵ flatly refused to play with him: a flat contradiction of the aims of Company in some ways, giving a good indication of the extent of the rift that has subsequently developed in some ways between the Generations.

Four members of the group in the above discussion, including Beresford, appear on Bead 9. (We've printed a portion of the sleeve of this disc to give not only the performance details but also an idea of the mechanics and costs of producing a record privately these days.) Beresford's contribution marks something of a departure from most of the other music issued on Bead so far. But aside from the theatricality which is an important part of his performance, as it is also particularly of Terry Day's percussion work, Beresford's 'departure' takes a form which is not necessarily predictable from the quotations above. He uses tonal chords, or even whole phrases or whole sections in a fairly clear tonality. But tonality with a wooden leg: a bit lopsided, in part 'artificial', an 'injured' tonality. Peter Cusack's guitar takes this up briefly early on, but otherwise the sounds of whistles and assorted percussion, which soon seem more 'normal' after you've been listening to six other Bead records, soon take over.

In an interesting note which forms part of the front cover for this record, someone (I'm not sure who) describes this first side as 'a sort of piano concerto in the Eric Morecambe tradition'. Beresford is obviously aware of the problems of piano improvisation in free music: the instrument seems to carry all its history on its back in a way which no other instrument does. If you're going to use the keyboard, you've got to take account of this, as well as its sheer weight of tone. To dive inside the instrument seems too often like a cheap way out. Beresford's apparent acceptance of the old and often somewhat decrepit pianos he's faced with on gigs — including, as on Side One of this record, an upright not a

This is a record of improvised music by a group called Alterations. The musicians and their instruments are as follows - Peter Cusack: nylon stringed guitar sometimes through small battery operated amplifier/Steve Beresford: piano - upright side 1, v. decrepit grand side 2 - euphonium, violin, trumpet small instruments, plastic guitar amplified through 5 watt battery amp, snapits, toy piano/Terry Day: percussion, 'cello alto saxophone, mandoline, homemade reeds, small instruments/David Toop: flutes, fire bucket, water, thrown/dropped/shaken percussives, Fender Esquire electric guitar, some plucked and bowed strings, some trumpetings and other noise.

The production of the record was as follows - a number of concerts were recorded on a Uher Stereo Report with 2 AKG D224 microphones. The final selection was from The Premises in Norwich, May 13, 1978. This is side 1. The second side was recorded at the London Musicians Collective, 42, Gloucester Avenue, NW1, by Max Eastley on June 22, 1978. The selection process was assisted by the transference of edits from the master onto cassette tape. The final master was prepared by Peter Cusack at Steim in Amsterdam. This tape was then taken to Nimbus, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, Wales where it was cut, processed and pressed. The cost for this section of the production for an edition of 500 was £346. The labels were designed by Steve Beresford and Peter Cusack and printed at Smith Press, 36, West Barnes Lane, Surrey. The cost for 500 labels was £39. After discussion by the group the cover was designed by David Toop and Steve Beresford and printed at Senol Printing, 4, Hardwicks Way, London, SW18 at an approximate cost of £120. The record is the 9th release on the BEAD label - a musician owned and run label based at 1, Chesholm Road, London, N16, England.

grand - clearly focuses attention on this problem even more. But even when what start as 'intrusions' from the piano get taken up in interesting ways by, for example, Toop's flute, I can still understand why a very fine pianist like the composer John White, who's done a lot of improvisation in his time, avoids the piano entirely, as far as I know.

So far I've discussed two trios and a quartet. Bead 3 forms solos and combinations of two, three and four players from a pool of six, plus a contribution from a team of handbell ringers on one track. But the focus is mainly on the electric guitar playing of Ian Brighton. Free improvisers tend to come from one of three backgrounds: a jazz and/or commercial music one (Bailey, Larry Stabbins), a 'classical' and composed music one (Guy, Philipp Wachsmann) or a 'non-musical', often art school one (Toop, Burwell); occasionally a more ambiguous mixture but usually with a 'classical' training (Howard Riley, Beresford). This applies to both First and Second generations, with the possible exception of the art school one: each pair of names above consists of one First and one Second generation improviser except for Toop and Burwell who are both Second - I couldn't think of an art school First musician.

Brighton is, like Bailey, from the first category, and his electric guitar playing relates quite a lot to Bailey's, I feel. It would perhaps be hard for it not to: on this instrument and in this country Bailey is the rather of free improvisation. But Brighton's playing is often cleaner, less cluttered, a trifle less frenetic than Bailey's. And less vital too: none of the tracks on this disc really held my attention. The track with the bells, the middle one on Side Two, also has a lot of alto saxophone from Jim Livesey: slightly more 'jazzy' than anything else on this disc, it also turns out somewhat more individual and interesting.

One of the many problems with making records of improvised music is that the musicians have often tended to 'move on' from the position which a particular recorded performance documents by the time it is actually released. This is a hazard of some contemporary non-improvised music too, of course, in which the turnover and subsequent rejection of ideas can sometimes still be pretty fast, even in the late 70s. Any record takes a certain amount of time to produce from the tape: actually making the tape itself is the easy part as far as the Bead improvisers are concerned. But unless you have an efficient commercial machine behind you, it takes time and a lot of effort to get the money together and get the disc actually circulating, as it were. Two years between original recording and release is not unusual, though in the case of Bead 4 it was actually a bit quicker. But then the time taken for a reviewer to get his review together and actually publish it has to be taken account of too. He has some of the same problems . . .

Bead 4 was recorded over four years ago, and Stabbins, the soprano and tenor saxophonist on this duo disc, has apparently changed more than most since then. (He can currently be heard playing with Elton Dean's Ninesense, for example, and there's a new quintet of free improvisers which also includes Burwell and Wren.) But I rather enjoyed Bead 4. There's an 'immediate' quality and, dare I say, a sense of purpose about it which is entirely lacking on Bead 3. Is it something to do with the fact that Roy Ashbury's percussion has a lot of regular repeated rhythms? It's incisive music (not so typically Second Generation?) and it could, I suppose, become a little wearing eventually. The title track has a sax solo at first balanced precariously above the mutterings of the percussion: an integrated, if intermittent song of a quiet, calm beauty transcending the fact that some of it is actually quite loud and even occasionally makes a pretence at aggression. Later things 'hot up' (this is meant almost traditionally). I think the music on this record is enhanced by the feeling it gives of an added dimension - even if only of an illusory kind: a sense - always tenuous, sometimes tantalising, often perhaps even irrelevant to the music's central core - of building on something (their own previous experience of playing together?). At the same time the considerable amount of pretty sparse playing is quite 'Second Generation' and makes a contribution to Peter Riley's 'theory'.

Cusack's guitar improvisations and tapes on Bead 5 'celebrate' two years of work in Holland, where there is a particularly flourishing free music scene.¹⁶ Perhaps slightly surprisingly, considering the environment in which his recent ideas have been formed, there is some very 'unjazz-

like' playing on this record: not only no jazz 'dirt', but less of the 'aura' of anything even vaguely to do with jazz that one finds unmistakably in the playing of, say, Bailey or Guy, or Brighton, Ashbury and Stabbins. Some of this is obviously due to Cusack's guitar, which is acoustic, not electric, to the deliberately wide stereo separation and to the even more 'compositional' use of tape, albeit environmental. And there is some tonal material that at least evokes some other styles of guitar playing even if they're not exactly jazz ones. But this record is definitely very Second Generation.

Bead 7, like Bead Cassette 1, involves Wren himself playing with musicians who, like him, have a 'classical' and even 'compositional' background. Bead 7's Duchampian title refers to the players' attempt to work the fact that 'improvised music is particularly sensitive to situation, acoustic properties of a room, and audience' into their performances, recorded live in a variety of venues in London and Holland. Though it's nowhere referred to on the sleeve or the disc label, the three musicians together constitute the group Chamberpot, now without Mayo, which David Roberts has twice reviewed in these pages. Their playing is characterised by a high level of activity, sometimes producing a great deal of noise. Wren's bass playing is admittedly less frenetic, less 'fauviste', than Guy's, but Wachsmann's electronically modulated violin is among the most violent things I've ever heard and Richard Beswick, the 'Beresford' of the group, plays oboe, guitar and other things in a decidedly nerve-jittering manner.

Bead 10 is by a group called Levers, ex-students of a new music course at Ravensbourne College of Art run by Oxley, Howard Riley and others. Wren described Levers to me as 'Third Generation' though, to the outside ear, this record doesn't demonstrate a markedly different attitude to their work from that evidenced by the Second Generation improvisers on Bead. There are some perhaps more excitable — but hardly truly gripping — vocal outbursts from one or more of the three musicians, who otherwise play percussion, guitar and alto sax doubling clarinet doubling 'Parneyphone' doubling 'Eric Phone' (I'm not sure what these latter two are!). But the mixture of sparseness, frenzy and occasional tunefulness which most of the six tracks demonstrate left me without any strong impressions of musical conviction.

Beads 11 and 12 continue the label's Dutch involvement; the central focus is Harry de Wit, who is not only the 'other' Dutch bass clarinetist called Harry (the 'alternative' to the celebrated 'avantclassical' player Harry Sparnaay) but also plays piano and percussion (he actually does relatively little clarinet playing on these two discs). Side One of Bead 11 has de Wit on bass clarinet and brushes and three other Dutch musicians on bass, trombone and trombone and voice respectively; de Wit transfers to piano and prepared piano for the three tracks of Side Two.

The single track on Side One starts and finishes in a laid-back manner very different from that of most of the Dutch improvisation which has circulated in Britain so far (most of it tends to be pretty punchy). But it has a big climax around two thirds of the way through (note the classical 'European' format!) which may remind the listener that that manic manic percussionist Han Bennink also hails from Holland. But there's a great deal of control here: the music takes such a long time to 'get going' that you start to wonder whether it's *about* 'getting going' at all (it turns out, I think, that it is), but the musical line is kept taut and the interest impressively retained.

The first track on Side Two has magical, throbbing prepared piano from which eventually emerges a brief passage of jazz-like walking pizzicato bass and then a number of fragments in quick succession; but it ends too quickly and too suddenly, I feel. (This is a fairly frequent 'fault' of improvised music on record. Often it's because the tracks are compiled from much longer takes and the impression is given that the choice isn't dictated by considerations of the 'wholeness' of a 'piece' — a consideration inappropriate to improvisation? Nevertheless, I think that most listeners, including improvisers, listen in 'wholes', and the resulting dichotomy is frequently unresolved.)

The second track on Side Two is much more obviously 'traditional'; sometimes it's almost (vaguely jazzily) 'neo-classical': the nearest thing this disc comes to the 'populist' Dutch free jazz 'school' of musicians like Willem Breuker and Leo Cuypers. It ends with an amazing section for two trombones and voice over an ostinato piano figure. The

final track includes some highly fragmented, even pointillist playing and builds to a vigorous climax, but it's not as tightly controlled as Side One.

Neither is anything on Bead 12, I feel; it generally lacks the earlier disc's individuality too. De Wit is here joined by Wachsmann; the first track and the second, extremely short one are duos. Two Dutch musicians — Kamphuis on bass again and Kees van Zelst on percussion — join them for the final track on Side One; the whole of Side Two is a trio for Wachsmann, de Wit and van Zelst. The very sectionalised formats give, in the opening sections of Side Two for instance, an almost 'classical' feeling of 'first movement', 'slow movement' and 'scherzo' before becoming more 'serious' and more lyrical with occasional outbursts, and then finally turning more and more 'thematic'. Coupled to the fact that Wachsmann is on the whole in much more 'evocative' mood than on Bead 7, this could have led somewhere interesting and different; in the event, though, it seems on this occasion to have had a curiously dissipating effect.

Another record which could almost be classified as 'Third Generation' is Bead 13, which consists of seven tracks by a British trio. Beswick, who as on Bead 7 uses his voice as well as oboe and guitar, produces sounds which give the impression of an effort altogether out of proportion to their purely sonic impact. It's partly due to the fact that he plays oboe, but it's as true of his other activities and it constitutes his own 'style'.

The pianist Matthew Hutchinson is apparently a 'straighter' jazz musician who has played with the John Williams Big Band, though his playing here often has less of the 'resonance' of the jazz virtuoso than de Wit's does. As well as 'ordinary' piano, Hutchinson uses electric piano and synthesizer, and he competes quite adventurously on the latter with Will Evans's percussion on track three of Side One. The overall 'sound' of this group, though, is on the whole not much more original or interesting than that of the players on Bead 10, though their command of musical ebb and flow seems more secure.

Beads 14 and 15 return to the 'Dutch Connection' and are unusual in that they are accompanied by extensive notes (by Peter Cusack) which explain why and how the records came about. Three players — Maarten van Regteren Altena, Cusack himself and Guus Janssen, playing cello/bass, guitar and piano respectively — are common to both discs; one of the ideas of the concerts done in Holland and Belgium by this trio with a variety of other musicians in 1978 and 79, from which these records are taken, was that 'the trio might develop a recognisable music of its own which would be heard as a similarity between the groups'. Even though this didn't really happen, according to Cusack, the resulting combinations, fragmentations, disputes and relationships not only between the players but between the players and their various audiences make up a fascinating picture of how this kind of improvisation actually works in daily practice: and how it is so crucially about the tensions which naturally arise when a group of people try to create music together in front of an audience.

Since to some extent the tracks on these two records feature a mixture of First and Second generation players, Beads 14 and 15 provide a valuable documentation of the kind of things that can happen when the Generations meet: though by no means all the 'tensions' are accounted for by this fact alone and these aren't, anyway, the only records on either the Bead or Incus labels to combine players with very different approaches from different Generations. And anyway, some of the friction happened 'off the record', so to speak: for example, the saxophonist John Tchicai was on tour with some of the other musicians when some of the tapes were made, but at the last concert, from which several tracks were drawn, he left the stage after 20 minutes and he doesn't actually feature on the records at all.

There are, as I said, 'tensions' which are not necessarily accounted for by the Generation gap. One of these concerns the Dutch pianist Guus Janssen, and it's instructive and interesting not only for the ways in which it contributes to the music's moment-to-moment unfolding and to its eventual direction, but because it typifies a perennial problem with free improvisation, and one which has already been touched on in this review. What should the function of functional tonality be in free music? In what circumstances does it have a place? Pedantic questions, perhaps, at least put like that: the musicians themselves

would no doubt phrase it rather differently, at least. But as Cusack points out in his notes, 'the nice tuneful and structured material that Guus is apt to use is a radical contrast to what most of the rest of us do'; a good example is the lumpy jazz-like solo with which Side One of Bead 14 begins. I'm intrigued by how the other musicians deal with Janssen's material, and indeed by how Janssen himself deals with it. Some of the results are less than satisfying, I feel, but the fact that our usual notions of 'compatibility', even of 'fusion', are challenged by some free improvisation would seem, as I have said in my earlier review, to be one of its strengths and one of the most powerful arguments for its future.

In addition to discs, Bead have now started to produce cassettes. Only one is available at the time of writing, and it features a group including Wren which, unlike Chamberpot, I've never heard before. The London Bass Trio, live, partly from the London Musicians Collective's first concert at the Cockpit Theatre, London on November 6, 1976, is just what it says: three monsters all growling, grunting, moaning, shrieking and singing away together in the most incredible combination I've heard for ages. The initial impact is amazing, and though it wears off after a while, the listener's interest should be held by the almost vocal and definitely lyrical as well as the violent and decidedly lumbering qualities of the playing, and by its sheer musicianship. I'd love to hear and see them live.

Two general comments with which to end. I've deliberately refrained from mentioning the titles of individual tracks meticulously and even the titles of whole albums in my review. While I don't agree with Peter Riley's criticisms of the programmatic trappings which surround Bead 3 (it's a bit difficult to do so when he doesn't seem to recognise that the titles and the 'fairy-story' enclosed with the record are rip-offs of J. R. R. Tolkien),¹⁷ 'Marsh Gas' and 'Cholagogues' (pre- or post-conceptual?) are perhaps the extreme examples, at least in the present group of records of what started as a private programmatic aspect of the musical activity, perhaps acting as 'inspiration' in some ill-defined way, which became public when they shouldn't, because the listener's way into the music isn't (can't be) the same as the player's. This is a common problem for the creative musician, and while at least some composers have solved it in their own ways, some improvisers perhaps still need to curb their natural and altogether laudable tendencies not to 'hide' anything. If that's what this rash of variously obscure titles means: one could take the less charitable view that it fulfils the role of camouflage. On the whole I've found the 'packaging' fairly unhelpful in coming to terms with the music as perceived, though I find it interesting to muse on its possible relevance to the music as conceived.

My other general comment concerns the qualities of the recordings themselves. I think the basic quality of transfer from tape to disc has improved since Bead began operations, both because they themselves have managed to find their way round the industry better and because the quality of privately produced records has improved generally over the past few years. The original tapes, often from live performances, inevitably vary somewhat, but none are really bad (and I didn't spot all the 'blemishes' — microphones being blundered into, etc. — that are listed on the sleeve of Bead 6). Transfer to cassette is less of a problem, of course, though the sound quality of Bead Cassette 1 is probably not as good as the best of the records. The other aspects of packaging are on the whole adequately done, though there are a few mistakes: e.g. the fourth track on Side One of Bead 9 lasts only 56 seconds and not 10 minutes 56 seconds as it says on the record label!

NOTES:

¹See reviews by David Roberts in *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), p.34, which includes a discussion of Beads 1 and 2, *Contact 16* (Spring 1977), pp.23-25, including Lysis and ARC Records and *Contact 18* (Winter 1977-78), pp.39-40, consisting of a discussion of the cassette series Blank Tapes; and by Malcolm Barry, *Contact 18*, pp.36-39 and Keith Potter, *Contact 19* (Summer 1978), pp.32-37, the last two being discussions of Incus Records.

²It may be that some back numbers are still obtainable, since the magazine folded only a year ago. The address is 42 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1, tel. 01-722 0456.

³For an introduction to the work of the LMC see Paul Burwell's article in *Contact 19* (Summer 1978), pp.38-39. The Collective's address and telephone number are the same as those for *Musics* magazine given above.

⁴From a conversation with the author.

⁵For an article on Riley see Malcolm Barry, 'Howard Riley and "Non-Jazz"', *Contact 14* (Autumn 1976), pp.12-16.

⁶It went on an Arts Council Contemporary Music Network tour in March this year. The sizeable line-up included Second Generation players Larry Stabbins and Philipp Wachsmann and First Generation musicians including Guy, Oxley, Parker, Howard Riley, Rutherford, John Stevens and Trevor Watts.

⁷See Curt Sachs, ed. Jaap Kunst, *The Wellsprings of Music* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), especially pp.91-111.

⁸'Bead Records', *Impetus 7* (1978), p.286. This article also contains the account of the problems of setting up a record company to which I referred in my opening paragraph.

⁹Frank Perry, 'A Review: Cholagogues', *Musics 16* (February 1978), pp.10-12.

¹⁰Peter Riley, 'Slow Music: a thesis with instances and some pictures', *Musics 17* (May 1978), pp.12-15.

¹¹See, for example, Trevor Wishart's chapter 'Musical Writing, Musical Speaking' in John Shepherd, Phil Virden, Graham Vulliamy and Trevor Wishart, *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1977), pp.125-153.

¹²'Technique and Improvisation', *Musics 19* (September 1978), pp.4-12.

¹³Peter Cusack, 'Musician and Context? A Musician's own Gig Review' *Musics 22* (June 1979), p.5. The occasion referred to was a five-day visit to the Birmingham Arts Laboratory in January 1979 by Beresford, Cusack, Terry Day and Toop.

¹⁴This and the following quotations are taken from 'Steve Beresford talks to Steve Lake at Steve Beresford's Flat on April 6th', *Musics 14* (October 1977), p.15.

¹⁵The Incus records from the 1977 Company Week which weren't reviewed by me last time have now all, I think, appeared. I referred obliquely to the 'rift' in my earlier review; three musicians in the 1977 Company Week — Anthony Braxton, Parker and Leo Smith — refused to play with Beresford, whom Bailey subsequently dropped from Company.

¹⁶There's quite a bit of information and comment on the Dutch scene as a result of Cusack's sojourn there; for example, *Musics 7* (April/May 1976) is a special Dutch issue and includes Cusack's 'Thoughts and Observations in Holland', pp.3-5.

¹⁷In 'Records', *Musics 14* (October 1977), p.22.

YORKSHIRE ARTS

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Leeds October Music Week 18-26 October, 1980

This new event subtitled Aspects of Twentieth Century Music includes concerts and workshops by the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** with **Gennadi Rohdestvensky** and **Victoria Postnikova**, **Philip Jones Brass Ensemble**, **Forbes Henderson**, **Prof. David Wessell**, **Martin Roscoe**, **Peter Donahoe**, **New Music Percussion Ensemble**, **Timothy Gray**, **Northern Sinfonia** with **Ivan Fischer** and **Gary Karr**, **Dr. John Paynter**, **Lontano**, **Alexander Abercrombie**, **Alan Davies**, **Wendy Nightingale**, **Fitzwilliam String Quartet**, **Allan Schiller**, **Leodian String Quartet**, **Dr. Graham Hearn**, **Turning Point**, **Tony Faulkner Big Band** and the **Music Serenade (English National Opera North)**. Further details from Artistic Co-ordinator, **Jenny Hughes**, 89 Clarendon Road, Leeds 2.

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Yorkshire Arts Association

Reviews and Reports

THE MUSIC OF ALBAN BERG by Douglas Jarman

Faber and Faber, 1979 (£17.50)

DAVID ROBERTS

'The following book is not a biography,' Dr Jarman cautions in his preface. That he needs to do so is a comment on the current state of the literature of music. While 'Life and Works' volumes abound, entire books devoted to serious discussion of a single composer's oeuvre are comparatively rare. This, the first full-length study of all the mature work of one of the major composers of the 20th century, is particularly welcome.

Its chapter divisions are as follows: 1. 'Introduction': a review of Berg's output, unfinished projects, circumstances of writing, chronology (14 pp.); 2. 'Pitch organization in the early and "free" atonal works' (65 pp.); 3. 'Twelve-note techniques' (67 pp.); 4. 'Rhythmic techniques' (28 pp.); 5. 'Formal structures' (48 pp.); 6. 'Conclusions': largely concerning Berg's numerology and passion for symmetry (19 pp.). Appendices include a 'Catalogue of Berg's works and manuscripts' and synopses of *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*; there is a bibliography and an index. A reviewer can always, if he can do nothing else, pick holes in an index, but it is worth while pointing out that a fairly considerable slip-up has been made in this one: all the entries that should have come after 'Verdi' (including, on a spot-check, 'Wagner', 'Waldberg', 'Wedekind', 'Weill', 'Westergaard', 'Whittall' and 'Zemlinsky') have gone missing. One or two other entries have gone astray too.

Despite Jarman's perfectly lucid style it is not an easy book to read. This comes about, I think, for two main reasons, the first of which is the organisation of the material. To have arranged it along topic lines was, in my submission, a clear mistake. The corpus of works is too small for this to be necessary and too disparate for it to be successful. Although Jarman tries hard to draw out links between pieces — and I'm not trying to deny they're there — still I am far more impressed by their differences, as I think anyone must be who steps back from the material and looks at it in perspective. An opera is quite simply different from a song or a string quartet, and to deal with all three in the same stretch of writing produces all kinds of imbalances. As things stand, material on individual works is scattered through the book (for example, substantial discussions of the *Lyric Suite* occur in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), and to understand the argument in a later chapter one must retain information from, or refer back to, earlier ones. This really does not make for a text that is simple to follow. A more straightforward arrangement of the material along the lines of a work-by-work discussion would have been more appropriate.

The second difficulty the average reader faces is the level at which the argument is pitched. In order to get much out of it, he must already know the music fairly well and have a pile of scores at his elbow. Naturally these are desiderata for the full appreciation of any analysis, but here they are virtual necessities. I am not against texts for specialists — far from it — but I don't think it was Jarman's aim to produce something that exclusive, nor, given the sort of thing he writes about, do I think it need have been the case. More music examples and more direct reference to them might perhaps have helped.

However, even if the reader does have to work at the book rather harder than might have been necessary, there is a great deal to be gained from the effort. While Jarman brings

no profoundly new approach to bear upon the music, he does provide an excellent synthesis and development of those approaches that to date have proved of value. Yet though I find the analyses to be sound and useful on the whole, some parts of the conceptual and terminological framework employed do worry me, and it is to a few of these issues that I shall be devoting most of the rest of this review.

The following passage, concerning the third of the Four Clarinet Pieces, Op. 5, occurs on p. 25 and may serve for an example. 'The reordering of x [a six-note collection] when it appears in the piano part at the beginning of the third piece, for example, produces an augmented triad, while the continuation of the clarinet phrase, at bar 1 of the same piece, outlines a diminished seventh chord. Both formations, which have already appeared at the end of the second piece, spring from the fact that the total content of xy [an eight-note collection including x] can be ordered in such a way as to form a chain of ascending or descending thirds...' (I should mention that though we are given music examples to show us xy , we are not shown the beginning of the third piece nor the manner in which xy is stacked in thirds.) In the first place, the logic is askew. 'The fact that xy (a collection of the type 0,1,2,3,5,6,7,9) can be strung out as thirds (octave repetition is necessary to achieve this) is not a sufficient condition for the formation of an augmented triad and a diminished seventh from an eight-note collection; for example the type 0,1,2,3,5,7,8,10 can be arranged as a chain of thirds but contains neither a diminished seventh nor an augmented triad. Hence the logic is invalid. Yet even if it had been valid, the teleological argument (the one 'springs from' the other) has no place in such a description of relations among note-collections: it is not a matter of cause-and-effect but of tautology. This is a persistent error of thought, and a particular snare for the analysis of music. The appearance of an explanation is given when in fact there is none.

Secondly, the use of the terms 'augmented triad', 'diminished seventh', and 'thirds' in an atonal context is highly suspect. Because we have ready-made names for certain collections it is tempting to use them, but that temptation should be avoided. One danger is that by privileging certain collections by such names we overlook or ignore what might possibly be more important collections simply because they have no names. Another is that by so describing these collections we bring inappropriate responses to them from our experience of tonal music. A term like 'thirds' is particularly suspect in an atonal context. By what criterion are we to judge in atonal music that interval-classes 3 and 4 together form a unified category? They might, but so might interval-classes 2 and 3 taken together, for which we have no name. Better to ditch the old terminology and adopt that from the Babbitt-Perle-Forte tradition which is far more efficient and, in actual fact, is quite easily and quickly grasped. Let it be understood that I am not calling for a mere transcription of comprehensible, familiar English into a less familiar integer notation. It isn't a matter of transcription, it's a matter of changing our conceptual frame through the use of a medium that is comparatively neutral and hence, unlike tonal terminology, doesn't prejudice too many issues.

Jarman makes fairly frequent references to 'tonal implications' in Berg's music. Nowhere, though, are we given a satisfactory definition of what we are to understand by tonality. Perhaps that is a lot to ask. But some clear statement of intention might have allayed my suspicions that many of these 'implications' are of a very weak order indeed. Take for example the discussion of the twelve-note

construction of the first movement of the *Lyric Suite* (pp. 82-84), where it is stated that 'the most important characteristic of the set is not the interval sequence but its harmonic and tonal implications'. I would submit that no twelve-note set examined in the abstract implies tonality more strongly than any other; it is the way the set is *used* that counts. In support of his argument, Jarman quotes Berg, who wrote that the set has 'two symmetrical halves. . . first half in F major, the second half in B or C flat major'. It is true that the first six pitch-classes of the set may be fitted into the scale of F major (and C too, for that matter), but tonality is not primarily about content, it's primarily about voice leading. (Otherwise Beethoven could never have written in the Lydian mode.) And voice-leading resides not in the set but in its compositional realisation, and this Jarman does not discuss.

Indeed I wonder whether this business of 'tonal implications' isn't altogether a red herring. We may make a philological study of an English poem and discover what elements in it derive from Norman French or Anglo Saxon, but it would be inappropriate to talk about its having Norman French or Anglo Saxon 'implications'. We simply say that it is a poem in English, to be understood entirely within those terms.

That Berg himself thought of his set in terms of F major and C flat major is of course important. (Though we should remember that with terminology lagging behind practice, what he thought and what he was constrained to say might not have been the same thing.) But it is important only to the degree that the composer's foibles are reflected in and elucidate the music. To the extent that they stand outside the music they cease to be important and are instead merely interesting. It is interesting, for example, to know that Berg was under the erroneous impression that this set was the only possible all-interval set. (Jarman, in his distaste for order relations, does not mention this feature.) Interesting, but not fundamentally important because it tells us nothing that explains the music. For the statement about the F major — C flat major hexachords to be of importance, it is necessary to demonstrate that at some point — any point — the music is actually in those keys. No demonstration is forthcoming.

The theory that Jarman is presenting us with here and elsewhere is essentially one of production (albeit an incomplete one): we have a very good picture of how the composer set about his task (though we are given little detail apart from the initial stages). Now that is an interesting kind of theory, but it's not, I think, an important one. What is required is a theory of the product: just the music as we have it, regardless of how it came into being. That's both an interesting and an important kind of theory. A third kind of theory, and perhaps the most important, is that of consumption — how we hear the music — but that I for one find comparatively uninteresting.

Discussion of twelve-note music too often stops at the point where Jarman leaves it, having done little more than examine the set in a highly idealised form. What we need in order to approach the reality of the work is such information as — and this just taking the pitch domain — the actual series-statements employed (transposition and aspect), their order, overlapping and perturbation, their distribution between horizontal and vertical dimensions, registers used and contours outlined, verticals produced between different sets, the importance (or otherwise) of aggregates and invariant subsets. And then there are pitch relations articulated by the other dimensions of the music. Of course this is out of the question for more than a few works in a book of this scope, but it's only after an examination of the detail that we can give more abstract statements credence.

These reservations are not trivial, but they do not seriously deflect from the fundamental usefulness of the book. Jarman has set down the base line from which further study of Berg's music will proceed.

23RD WARSAW AUTUMN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC SEPTEMBER 14-23, 1979

JOHN CASKEN

Not a fully comparative review of the 1978 and 79 Festivals as originally promised, which at this stage would possibly be a little redundant, but a report from a participating composer who has had connections with Poland for some

years. The 1980 Festival will be reviewed by Hilary Bracefield and published rather more speedily. (Ed.)

By any standard, the Warsaw Autumn Festival is an impressive affair, both as a platform for composers and artists of international repute and as a means of presenting home-grown talent. Last year's festival, slightly longer than usual, was no exception, although it can be said that there were fewer startlingly original works than in the previous year, some works were distinctly feeble and some, though not all, deserved the audience reaction they received. There were some disappointments too: Paul Zukofsky was prevented at the last minute from coming to play Ives' four sonatas for violin and piano, owing to personal circumstances. But on the whole, events went off smoothly in spite of the occasional changes to the programme.

The theme throughout the 1979 Festival was music-theatre of one sort or another: Maxwell Davies's *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus*, Orff's fairy-tale opera *Die Kluge*, Penderecki's *Paradise Lost* and Henze's *El Cimarron* were among the major events. The Fires of London were conducted by Peter Maxwell Davies and the usual cast of singers in a stirring performance of *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus* at a packed, patient and attentive house. However, it was the Stuttgart Opera Company (Württembergische Staatstheater Stuttgart) which made the most impact, presenting Orff, Penderecki and Henze. Klaus Hirte as El Cimarron the slave gave a strong and suitably nervous rendition, well-supported by his three instrumental colleagues. The previous evening Penderecki's opera *Paradise Lost* (1975-78) received a very good performance with impressive production and singing and firm orchestral playing under the direction of Janos Kulka. One immediately wonders how Penderecki's language will cope with Christopher Fry's libretto (after Milton). The simple answer is that the Penderecki-isms which are universally recognised are here hardly present at all. To suit the epic-drama proportions of the subject, Penderecki has modelled his musical language for this opera on examples from the past, most notably Wagner: a fact he seemed keen to deny at a press conference. No longer the jig-saw construction of contrasting and complementary textures, this music now respects operatic convention in the same way that the Violin Concerto (1976-77), heard earlier in the week, respects Sibelius and at the same time pays homage to Bach-Bruckner. Now the music is homogeneous; it moves forward in impressive arches with very clear tonal centres (sometimes too clearly imprinted in the listener's mind by long pedals which slow down the rate of harmonic change). The production moved from delightful, exotic gauzes (very reminiscent of Gustave Moreau's work) to the horrific (slides and films of war and mutilated children), and on either side of the stage sat tiers of chorus members in black costumes and with ghostly-white illuminated faces. The production seemed to be attempting to solve the problem of modern music drama in a way that the music was not. In German, the performance took on an aspect quite noble and impressive, qualities entirely missing from the later Radio 3 broadcast of the American premiere.

Just as Penderecki's music seems to have mellowed, so other Polish composers showed that their priorities are also changing. It would have been inconceivable for Jerzy Maksymiuk to present a concert with his excellent Polish Chamber Orchestra ten years ago without some evidence of the then characteristic Polish string techniques together with a good dollop of clusters. The two works which were acclaimed in their concert at this year's festival showed that the Polish string sonority, as used by younger composers, has grown up. Marek Stachowski's *Divertimento* (1978) and Krzysztof Meyer's Fifth Symphony (1978-79) were both striking and mature essays for string orchestra. In each there was a good deal of dramatic contrast, one was made to feel physically excited by the *real* virtuosity of writing and playing, and any 'effects' were achieved as part of the logical flow of ideas. To this extent one can draw a clear line from Lutosławski's *Funeral Music* to his *Preludes and Fugue*, without whose example, Bartók notwithstanding, Stachowski's and Meyer's works would not have been possible.

If experiment with sonority and texture for their own sake is waning, what is taking its place? Well, of course, some composers continue with their old preoccupations; Kazimierz Serocki's *Pianophonie* (1976-78) for piano, electronic sound-transformation (in collaboration with the

Experimentalstudio der Heinrich-Strobel-Stiftung des Südwestfunks, Freiburg) and orchestra showed a remarkable lack of sensitivity to the opportunities offered by this new piano-orchestra relationship. Nevertheless the work won the Italia Prize 1979 and was broadcast twice within a few weeks on Radio 3. May doodleclusters soon retire from the repertoire of contemporary piano techniques. On the other hand, there were Polish works in which the expressive element was to the fore at the expense of vigorous, dramatic argument. The mystic *Gloria* by the 26-year-old Paweł Szymański was a most evocative and economical work indebted in spirit if not in language to Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*. Scored for female choir and orchestra, it contains references to Renaissance liturgical music and a good mixture of oriental pluckings and birdsong; Holst's 'Neptune' would not have been out of place in the context of this work. Eugeniusz Knapik (b.1951) is another young Pole who showed that he was quite prepared to encompass a number of styles in his search for an immediate and expressive one. The first movement of his *Corale, interludio e aria* (1978) for flute, harpsichord and strings contrasted block chords made up of semitones, tones, minor or major thirds scored in octaves, reminiscent of the pomp of liturgical music, interrupted by wilder, more modern gestures. I was reminded of the simplistic but severely self-disciplined *Refren* by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Knapik's teacher, who has also written pieces 'in the ancient style'. By contrast, the 'aria' was romantic, almost Mahlerian, and after the 'Corale' sounded very sweet and tidy.

I was therefore pleased to discover untidy but invigorating qualities in Tadeusz Baird's uninspiringly-titled *Variations in the Rondo Form* (1978). This may well prove to be one of his most substantial works: the music showed a toughness and a deliberate persistence quite unlike his more usual rhapsodic style. Zbigniew Bargielski's recent works have been received with some success. Born in 1937, he was a law student who turned to music when he was 21. His *Alpine String Quartet* shares similar qualities with his later *Violin Concerto*, performed at the 1978 Festival: namely, a fondness for soaring lyrical passages based on thirds built up in the form of dominant and diminished sevenths and augmented triads in a high, singing register for all instruments. There is also more assertive writing with instruments playing *ff arco* in the lower violin range, but despite this, one's impression is of a rich, melodic work. And yet, paradoxically, there are no real melodies, merely lines with fixed nodal or harmonic points. The prize for the most original ensemble must go to Andrzej Dobrowolski for his *Music for three accordions, harmonica and percussion* (1977), a unique sound which is distributed symmetrically in space, as in a number of his works. His use of this ensemble is economical and, surprisingly, witty. The most amusing contribution came from Witold Szalonek with his piece for prepared tuba *Piernikiana*, written for tubist (and préparateur) Zdzisław Piernik. Looking a bit like an old tuba that's gone to seed, the instrument belches, grunts and screams its way across Szalonek's different musical levels. The concept of simultaneous, 'unbroken' strata is an interesting one, and the changing preparations added another, theatrical dimension: the tuba plays the tubist.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from this Dada-like piece was Lutosławski's *Les espaces du sommeil* (1975) which was performed in the opening concert and sung, as in the 1979 Prom performance, by John Shirley Quirk. Unmistakably in the same vein as *Mi-Parti* (a later work), this is the composer's first piece for solo voice and orchestra since *Paroles tissées* (1965), but in places it harks back even further, to the *Five Songs to words by Kazimierz Makowicz* (1958). It is not only the arisgo vocal line in *Les espaces* which brings Debussy's *Pelléas* to mind, but also the feeling that *we* shouldn't be there: in this sense he admirably captures the intimate world of the edge of sleep.

One of the great discoveries of the Festival was the playing of the young Russian cellist Ivan Monigetti, who introduced another Lutosławski work: *Sacher Variation* for solo cello (1976). This was written as a birthday tribute for the Swiss conductor Paul Sacher, at the request of Mstislav Rostropovich, who invited ten composers to write a short piece based on the letters SACHER (E flat, A, C, B, E, D). Lutosławski's solution is quite simple: each appearance of the notes of the theme is increased in a related sequence of pitches (always in the same order), from 1 to 2 to 4, 7, 11,

16, 22, 29 to 37 in number, with a final statement of 18. In between these phrases he characteristically uses the remaining hexachord, the treatment of which is non-thematic and more in the character of a fantasy, with rapid quarter-tone passages reminiscent of his earlier *Cello Concerto*. Monigetti also played *Ten Etudes* (1974) by the young Russian composer Sofia Gubaydulina, each of which uses different means of articulation. I rather admired these studies and would recommend them to any young cellist in search of an enterprising item for a recital. Xenakis's *Kottos*, named after one of the hundred-armed giants fought and defeated by Zeus, and requiring almost as many fingers, gave Monigetti a chance to show that he had not only mastered the technique of playing this most difficult work, but that he could convey the compelling passion behind the relentless scraping. In his second concert, Monigetti's programme had to be changed at the last minute due to the unavailability of the pianist. Nevertheless Toshiro Mayuzumi's *Bunraku* of 1960 (traditional Japanese puppet theatre) was a welcome item exploring the potential in adapting Japanese instrumental techniques to a Western instrument. Alfred Schnittke's *Sonata for cello and piano* (1978) aims to 'combine elements of new and old music in peaceful coexistence'. This produced some strong ideas but I would hardly have described their co-existence as peaceful.

One of the best works of the Festival was by Luc Ferrari: *Cellule 75 - Force du rythme et cadence forcée* for piano, percussion and tape (1975), a work with a committed socio-political message. The whole had a great presence and, growing from a simple opening to virtuosic complexity, made use of the phasing of rhythmic models which were interesting not only for their rhythmic intricacies but also for their musical types. The composer's declared aim was to express a number of ideas connected with everyday life and, more specifically, related to events in 1975, the year of composition. A 'cellule' is a musical cell but also a prison cell; 'Force du rythme' is an attempt to find liberation in rhythm (overtones of jazz-rock); 'cadence forcée' represents the reverse: compulsion, permanent work, exploitation, the madness of consumption and a march rhythm as a demonstration of repression — hence a work

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in which individual and collective energies are set in opposition to authoritarian control. This was the final item in a concert given by Gérard Frémy (piano) and Jean-Pierre Drouet (percussion). The opening item, *Pour un pianiste* (1973-74) for tape (realised at Bourges) and piano by Michèle Bokanowsky, was a delicate gamelan-type piece with subtle piano preparation.

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra gave a concert of contemporary Finnish music. *Dia* (1979) by Paavo Heininen (b.1938) was a long work (over 30 minutes) with excellent details whose overall effect I found rather grand, even pompous. Nevertheless there were some tantalising sounds, showing a real command of the orchestra: a work I should like to hear again, but without the indigestible programme note. Erik Bergman, a senior composer (b.1911), was present for the performance of his *Birds in the Morning* (1978) for flute and orchestra. It is interesting that a composer of his generation should attempt something new, particularly with regard to flute technique, but the overall impression was that this was a very cosmetic work. Not so Kalevi Aho's Fifth Symphony (1975-76). I disliked this work, but it was one of the most striking things in the Festival, showing maturity in handling the orchestra in an outrageously bold manner. It was very loud for much of the time, the harmony was often aggressively diatonic, there were echoes of Nielsen, Shostakovich, Mahler and, especially, Ives, with a vulgar waltz emerging out of a *Fourth of July*-type tutti. It was professedly a work about chaos; in terms of sound Aho achieved this, but through well-organised material and form. A young composer (b.1949) of whom we should hear more.

This was music of a very different kind from the English composers represented: Maxwell Davies, Paul Patterson, Gwyn Pritchard and myself. Patterson's *Cracovian Counterpoints* received a hurried performance in Jerzy Maksymiuk's concert with the Polish Chamber Orchestra. The performance of Pritchard's striking *Nephalauxus* (1977) for string quartet and two percussionists was a good example of what can happen when the SPM invite foreign guests to their Composers' Weekend. Stachowski heard this work at the 1978 Weekend and suggested it for the 1979 Festival in Warsaw.

Bruno Canino and Antonio Ballista gave two concerts: the first a late-night performance of Stockhausen's *Mantra*, a work about planes of consciousness performed at a time when one's unconscious is desperately trying to take over. The second concert, at 5pm the next day, presented Ligeti's *Monument-Selbstportrait-Bewegung* (1976), a work I admire for the excellence of the piano writing and the appropriateness of the ideas for the medium. A sonata for two pianos (1966) by the young Italian Salvatore Sciarrino (b.1947) had a unique toy-shop atmosphere (high register and residues of tonal music) which remained constant and without contrast. Franco Donatoni's *Black and White No. 2* (ten finger exercises) was just that. In another concert, the fellow Italian Vettorio Gelmetti played his own *Eine Kleine K Music* (1979) for piano and Mozart-on-tape (having undergone equalisation and filtering): pure 'K'. *Sinfonia con giardino* (1977-78) for orchestra by Niccolò Castiglioni (b.1932), a composer we hear too little of nowadays, redressed the Italian balance. This was a delicate, finely-heard work, to the point and with a clear formal shape (similar, he claims, to an ancient Patrician garden).

Myr (1978) by the young Swede Rolf Enström (b.1951) and *Klangshatten - mein Saitenspiel* (1972) by the 44-year-old German composer Helmut Lachenmann were overtly experimental works. *Myr* is a visual electronic composition for three screens and quadrasonic tape. In the course of the work approximately 360 slides are used, reflecting images of 'soil/earth, the stones, the mirrors and the geometry', which together with sounds on tape deal with 'man's disasters, desire for power to transform nature to manifest himself — to prove to himself that he has the right to exist in the gigantic cosmos'. Visually the work is very fine: the composition of the individual slides and their sequence, three at a time, is well constructed. The quality of the tape is also very good, although I had difficulty relating the extended sounds ('the gigantic cosmos?') to the realist (landscapes) and supra-realist images (the latter are landscapes with mirrors reflecting the sky, and urban images) on screen, where the ideology may have been understood even without the music.

Lachenmann's work suffered from audience impatience and intolerance. A large body of strings and three partially-

prepared pianos made infinitesimal sounds during the course of the work, so infinitesimal at times and separated by long periods of silence that it was inevitable, although very regrettable, that the audience should feel the need to contribute its own sounds: a dropped bunch of keys here, a coin or two there. Eventually catcalls and handclaps stopped the work (during a live TV broadcast: what would Richard Baker have done...?) and resumed only after a personal plea from the composer to the audience to understand that the work was about 'pianissimo', the rejection of sound and a reversal of concert hall practice. This Cageian aesthetic of composing a piece around the sounds that an audience normally doesn't hear has much to recommend it. Like 4'33", so many of the actual sounds might have been startling, even poetic, given the chance. In the event perhaps the Festival Committee miscalculated the patience threshold of an audience at its last concert of a long festival. This came almost as an invitation for the post-Festival party to begin early.

MUSICA NOVA, GLASGOW SEPTEMBER 16-22, 1979

NICHOLAS BANNEN

The conception and organisation of this year's Musica Nova seem to have been greatly improved in comparison with previous occasions.¹ Having not attended before, I make the comparison very much on hearsay; however, I felt that on this occasion the timetabling of seminars and rehearsals catered well for students and public alike, avoiding major clashes while sustaining momentum. The seminars were given to groups of a size conducive to discussion and participation, while some composers even made themselves available for private lessons, a privilege few of us expected. Socially too the event was well-oiled, with plenty of opportunities to meet informally players (soloists and members of the Scottish National Orchestra and the Scottish New Music Ensemble), administrators (an important channel for feedback) and fellow students, as well as the many publishers and critics who had journeyed north for some important premieres.

Given this successful background, it was a pity that the focus of all this activity — the performances of resident composers' works — left so much to be desired. In the first concert Tona Scherchen-Hsiao's *Tzoue*, for harpsichord trio, had to be cancelled because the parts did not arrive in time. Since the other work of hers presented in Glasgow, *L'invitation au voyage*, for chamber orchestra, received a shaky and unsympathetic performance under Elgar Howarth, this was a major disappointment. Scherchen-Hsiao deserves better representation than this, as the tape she played of a French performance of *Vague-Tao*, a large, colourful and coherent orchestral work, proved to those who heard it. A London performance of this score should be arranged as soon as possible.

Thomas Wilson's music received the most consistently adequate performances, to the extent that one feared it represented a Scottish house-style, though his *Ritornelli*, in his own arrangement for full string orchestra, taxed the members of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. The doubtless cleaner lines of the original, for solo instruments, might have persuaded one that his classically twelve-note sound-world has something to offer. Robin Holloway's Second Concerto for Orchestra was given a performance by the SNO under Sir Alexander Gibson haunted by the constant impression that something was about to go irretrievably wrong. Why does Gibson exert so little rhythmic control in music of this metrical complexity? At times one felt that the whole thing was in the hands of his admirable sub-conductor, Edwin Roxburgh.

But it was Brian Ferneyhough, a composer used to the dismissive attitude of British orchestral players, whose *La terre est un homme* emerged with least satisfaction from the parochial hostility of the SNO's music-making. To begin with, Elgar Howarth displayed shortcomings of preparation and technique which must only have encouraged the players. A crucial contra-bass clarinet part was not catered for, little accurate representation of the dynamic and timbral instructions in the score was attempted, and every opportunity was taken to waste rehearsal time slinging



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TIMES-UNION (Rochester, N.Y.)

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(BIOGRAPHICAL CATALOG AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST)



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mud at the unfortunate composer. The issue is not whether the music of Ferneyhough (or Scherchen-Hsaio, or even Holloway) is good or bad, but whether an orchestra should reap the kudos of premieres, recordings, etc., without seriously meaning to do justice to the composers' intentions. (The following week the situation was reversed, as a small but significant section of the LSO applauded Ferneyhough and the conductor Abbado after the final run-through of the London premiere.) In case anyone feels the position in Glasgow is being exaggerated, the following evidence exists: exhibit A, photographs of Holloway and Scherchen-Hsaio retrieved from the SNO centre dart-board where they had hung impaled like voodoo dolls; exhibit B: expensive orchestral material defaced and in some cases irreparably damaged by players. (Who pays for such vandalism? The public? The Arts Council?).

There were some good performances to be heard: a rabble-rousing account by Howarth and the SNO of Schoenberg's opus 9b (the not-so-Kammersymphonie) which showed just what this band is capable of; Harry Sparnaay's persuasively brilliant reading of Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study I* for bass clarinet; sterling work from the Scottish New Music Ensemble in Wilson, early Holloway and student pieces; a sensitive recital of Crumb, Eisler and Shostakovich by John Tilbury, who together with Jane Manning and Gregory Knowles tackled some difficult pieces in the workshops; and a concert, less weighty than the SNO's, in which the BBC SSO under Christopher Adey played, in addition to Wilson's *Ritornelli*, a piece entitled *Source* by the young Scot, Edward McGuire, which combined pleasantly a colourist sonority with folk elements growing from Janáček-like fragments to a gentle modal continuum. The piece featured offstage percussion (cowbells and bamboo) played by remote control by tugging on a clothes-line.

The BBC SSO concert also contained Holloway's sequined *Scenes from Schumann* and a work whose presence in these circumstances I found hard to accept, a new Piano Concerto by Brian Chapple, played by Howard Shelley. Hardly a note was not immediately redolent of Prokofiev, Shostakovich or a rhythmically anaemic Messiaen. Unlike Holloway's borrowings and anachronisms, which have at least a donnish brilliance that itself approaches originality, the second-handedness of this work was difficult to take seriously. The thought that it was taken seriously enough by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust, who commissioned it, and by Musica Nova to be performed was, for some of us, most disturbing.

Fortunately the student works rehearsed came closer to contemporary styles. Though no outstanding compositions appeared and the competitive aspect introduced a note of embarrassment to the final concert, the opportunity of hearing a variety of procedures and notational experiments in rehearsal was of great value. The Scottish New Music Ensemble of flute, trumpet, double bass and piano (soon labelled the 'Gang of Four') proved an awkward challenge to write for, though it produced a first prize-winner of the award donated by Chandos Records. The winning work, *Ainulindale*, a set of tone-pictures based on Tolkien by James Macmillan, impressed me less than several of the other works played. Malcolm Singer's clever piece of music-theatre, *A Singer's Complaint*, for Jane Manning's group, and John Lunn's instrumental *Journeys of Nothing in the Land of Everything* also received awards, and a special extra sum was presented to John Marlow Rhys, despite the fact that his *Precipitevolissimevolmente* was unperformable in the circumstances. I found the works for the piano/percussion group of greater interest than those for the SNME and was impressed by Christopher Bodman's *Soundscape Tranquillity*, memorable for the balletic grace with which Gregory Knowles played the percussion part.

Tilbury, Knowles and Manning gave useful seminars in which the emphasis was on technical potential and notation. The experience of hearing all of Maxwell Davies's marimba parts played in succession by Knowles certainly provided a new perspective on his music. Manning demonstrated characterisation by vocal colouration in an unaccompanied solo cantata-opera written for her by Judith Weir (now Crambe Fellow at Glasgow University). Tilbury included a workshop on the piano music of Cage.

A further new feature of this Musica Nova was the electronic music course, run by Stephen Arnold, who also mounted a concert of new British and American tape pieces. The studio was open for almost the entire week,

with David McKenzie tirelessly and enthusiastically explaining all to anyone who wandered in. The equipment Glasgow possesses is most impressive, and the studio would make a good base for a featured composer in the next event in 1982.

The overall impression was that this was a most successful Musica Nova. Criticism of the areas I found disappointing poses problems; the event would not exist but for the advocacy of Sir Alexander Gibson and the organisation of the SNO, but at the same time the low standard of performance hardly justified the importance attached to the premières. We must not bite the hand that feeds us, but improvements will be required if the event is to retain credibility and attract a more than merely local interest. As it was, very few foreign musicians attended, a sad state of affairs if British contemporary music is to break through the insularity that continues to stifle progress. It would be interesting, too, were a composer from outside the conventions of strict notation and acoustic instruments to be featured next time: Cage, Globokar or Kagel, perhaps. For in a curious way the gulf that seems at first to exist between, for instance, Holloway and Ferneyhough is soon recognised as a difference of degree. Both are stimulated by the permutative properties of advanced notation to build complex structures in which much of the detail is lost to the ear. Both have a liking for romantic gesture, even if they wear the heart on different sleeves: compare the last bars of, respectively, *La terre est un homme* and the Second Concerto for Orchestra. The presence next time of a composer working outside the late late-Romantic tradition would be a great leavener.

NOTE:

¹For a review of the 1976 Musica Nova see *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), pp. 40-41. (Ed.)

TESTIMONIUM V, JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV OCTOBER 1979

BRIGITTE SCHIFFER

Testimonium is a festival of contemporary music which takes place every two or three years, modelled on the two-day scheme of Donaueschingen. The programme consists entirely of commissioned works, and the guiding spirit of the festival is Recha Freier, a woman of determination and vision who is also a well-known writer of poetry and prose. She founded Testimonium in 1966, in collaboration with the composer Roman Haubenstock-Romati, with the purpose of creating a body of contemporary music which would testify to the history of the Jewish people and draw for its subject-matter from folklore, the Bible, legend and history. The first festival took place in 1968.

'The Jewry of Spain' was the theme of Testimonium V, which was held in Jerusalem on October 16 and 17 and repeated in Tel Aviv the following week. The Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra played under the Chilean conductor Juan Pablo Izquierdo. Some texts were suggested by Recha Freier, but the composers were left entirely free in their choices and treatment of the given theme.

Yitzhak Sadai, from Tel Aviv, devised an audio-visual event called *Trial 19*, dealing with the persecution, trial and death of Leonor Gonzales, who was burnt in Zocodover Square in Toledo on October 15, 1492. The equation of ear-splitting noise with physical pain was as crude as the technical means were primitive, and the audience was subjected to a surfeit of decibels and a display of (socialist?) realism that was ill-conceived and out of place.

Gilbert Amy took an entirely different attitude to the Spanish theme. *Sin anim sha'ananim* is the setting of a liturgical poem by Ibn Gabirol, from the 11th century, for alto voice, clarinet, cello and instrumental ensemble. A sound-tapestry of arabesques, ornaments and melisma, delicately designed and beautifully textured, creates a climate of Eastern worship and ecstasy and catches the spirit of the words in all their agitation and urgency.

Emmanuel Nunes, from Lisbon, chose as the subject of his symphonic movement, *Hesed* (Grace), the description of the death of R. Simeon bar Yohai contained in the 13th century *Book of Splendours*, but in spite of a certain fluidity the music remained static and amorphous, and the extraordinarily sumptuous language of the text was nowhere matched by the score, which created little impact and was soon forgotten.

Not so the new work of Stockhausen's, which will long be remembered, if only for the shadow it cast and the stir it created. The word 'shadow' may be badly chosen, for *Michaels Jugend* ('Michael's Youth'), the title of Stockhausen's contribution, belongs to *Licht*, his present work in progress, which will eventually take the form of an opera based upon the seven days of the week, outdoing the *Ring* by three days and many extravaganzas.

And so it came to be that Jerusalem had, for a short time, its own Festspielhaus, an idea that was not to everybody's liking. Initially a text from the *Apocrypha* had been agreed upon with Recha Freier, but Stockhausen decided instead to write his own libretto and to dedicate to Freier the first scene of the first act of the fifth day ('Childhood'). The *Apocrypha* were relegated to a pre-recorded tape part sung in Hebrew, one of the most memorable features of this strange, though entirely predictable work.

As the text of *Michael's Youth* was written and performed in German, the audience, mostly non-German-speaking, was spared the more unpalatable details. The three basic figures — Mother, all kindness and love; Father, all evil and violence; and Archangel Michael, their son come down to earth to bring mankind nearer to God — are each enacted by a singer, an instrumentalist and a dancer/mime and most of the symbolism involved is as alien to Jewish thought as the image of the Holy Trinity, evoked again and again. Rather than a testimony, *Michael's Youth* was a lesson in superb discipline, total professionalism and the highest technical skill. Nothing was left to chance and all the performers, including Marjella and Markus Stockhausen (piano and trumpet), were brought to Israel from Cologne, where the tape had been recorded beforehand.

Other composers had to rely on the Vocal Ensemble of Hamburg, but the unfortunate last-minute cancellation of their visit brought about the cancellation of two performances, those of Alexandre Tansman's *Apostrophe to Zion* and Cristóbal Halffter's *Jarchas de Dolor de Ausencia*. Only one of the three choral works was saved, thanks to the combined efforts of the Rinat National Choir and the Chamber Choir of the Rubin Academy of Music. This was Mauricio Kagel's *Vox Humana?* for solo loudspeaker, women's voices and orchestra. The music presents itself as a slow ceremonial that unfolds gradually, gathers momentum, reaches a climax and breaks off, then starts again and changes as it touches new regions and wanders through strange lands, Spanish, Arab and further east. The text comes from Isaac Levy's anthology, *Chants Judéo-espagnols*, in which Kagel found a poem in Ladino, an ancient idiom still used by descendants of Spanish Jews and with which he had become familiar during his childhood in Argentina. An invented language, incomprehensible to the listener, and a repertoire of separate Ladino words are used by the choir, their singing punctuated by such unusual effects as the hiss of small cymbals or the 'shush' of hands rubbed together.

The text, a mere four lines of the poem, is heard only in the last part of the cantata, when an anonymous and unemphatic voice is heard over the loudspeaker and paraphrased many times. 'Madres, non sospirex, non sospirex màs,' says the voice, but how could bereaved mothers ever stop their sighing? A passionate 'No!' from the choir ends this very moving, very beautiful work. The echo of many strands, of many secret links between texts that are sung or spoken and invented or torn apart, and of a music so simple, so straightforward and yet so complex, fills the mind with awe and wonder. *Vox Humana?* must be repeated soon. For Recha Freier it was the fulfilment of a dream; for her audience it was a unique and unforgettable experience.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FESTIVAL, HUDDERSFIELD OCTOBER 25-31, 1979

HILARY BRACEFIELD

The second Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival was bigger and better than the previous one and provided an exhilarating if exhausting week for those who stayed the course. It also raised a number of thoughts about such enterprises.

In his review of the first Festival¹ John Shepherd made some comment on the rightness of contemporary music in a close-knit semi-industrial community such as

Huddersfield, and certainly it seemed often slightly incongruous to be walking through the uncaring crowds in the new Markets area of the city bound for a recital of music by, say, Stockhausen and Lutoslawski. Given, however, the enthusiasm of the director, Richard Steinitz, and the facilities of the Huddersfield Polytechnic, it is an eminently suitable place for such a festival: more or less in the middle of a sizeable number of the country's population, easy enough to get to, and small enough to provide the right sort of atmosphere for casual and social meetings with other participants. If in future years the Festival can keep up the standard of the 1979 performers and concerts, the music departments of all surrounding universities and colleges should be forced to send droves of their students along.

But because of the sudden unavailability of the Huddersfield Town Hall (due to dry rot...), the 1979 Festival retreated even further inside the boundaries of the Polytechnic, and although music students came in greater numbers, the publicity did not bring in enough outside or even local people. Now this is a well-known problem of all contemporary music, but a festival should be a way of exciting people into going to things they would not normally visit, or bringing the events to places where the people can be found. Two concerts particularly showed up this problem and could give the organisers food for thought.

At the first, a ready-made audience of retired people, ladies in hats and shoppers with carrier bags and so on — a cross-section of the Huddersfield community — filled the Venn Street Arts Centre for a lunchtime recital by Rohan de Saram (cello) and Douglas Young (piano). This was not, alas, because of the reputation of the performers, but because this cheap (10p!) Tuesday programme was also one of a series which has become a staple part of Huddersfield's concert going. Good! For various eccentric-sounding reasons the advertised programme was not played, but Delius, Debussy, Bartók and Young's own *River* provided a mixture of 'easy' and 'difficult' listening and there was no stamping out of the hall when Toshiro Mayuzumi's *Bunraku* was also included.

Conversely, a rather small audience assembled in the Polytechnic Great Hall to hear John Tilbury playing some of Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* and Denis Smalley presenting two tape works by Bayle and Parmegiani. Right in the middle of the student campus, where no doubt large numbers fight to get into experimental rock concerts, the occasion was not seized to draw young people in, and the concert itself was not presented to appeal to such an audience.

Now exactly how the staging and publicity of the Festival should be done to create maximum interest and audiences I would hesitate to advise, but in future years I hope it will become more a part of the Huddersfield, the Yorkshire and the northern musical scene than it is yet. Perhaps this will be judged better after the next Festival when the Town Hall can be used again, and the new refurbished church building on the campus will be available. And perhaps the Festival can try getting out on the street among the people.

No doubt festival organisers in general are always hampered by who is available to be booked. I'd like to see Huddersfield keep up the standard of visiting players from Europe, America and further afield. They need to be heard more often outside London. I like the idea of using British performers 'in residence' to work with the entrants in the Yorkshire Arts Association Young Composers Competition, but thought that this year's group — Gemini (directed by Peter Wiegold) — could have been given more opportunity to perform in the Festival proper. An emphasis this time on solo virtuosi made possible extremely interesting comparisons; ensemble programmes were rather lacking, although the Town Hall disaster forced the cancellation of one that was planned. One or two 'themes' are probably needed to give coherence to a festival of 14 or so concerts. This year's two themes — the variety of virtuosi and some emphasis on folk-based music — may have been accidental but they were appreciated. I'd welcome more group performances, visits from other important British performers and some attempt to show the range of work on the experimental side. Some experimental ensembles would be especially suited to going out into the streets, but so would some of the more exuberant music groups working within the Polytechnic itself!

A festival is a good place for world and British premieres. An organiser is hampered if a composer doesn't deliver the goods, but I hope the Festival will continue to offer a good

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number of new pieces. And I hope it keeps the lectures and discussion sessions, which can give interesting insights into the thinking of the featured performers and composers.

The association of the YAA Young Composers Competition with the Festival is a useful one, as is the presentation of several of the finalists' pieces in discussion workshops. Of the several works chosen for Gemini to play in the workshop, Julian Dale's *Comme s'en vont les écrevisses*, using texts by Apollinaire, was a good choice for the concert: bold, assured and written well for both the voice (Margaret Field) and the instrumental combination. The winning percussion work, by John Weeks (played by James Wood), was too long for its limited effects. One of last year's winners, Michael Parkin, has subsequently had his work performed by the Northern New Music Players (conductor Barrie Webb) who on this occasion gave the première of his *Reflections from a Slow Country*. This work, for chamber orchestra, showed the composer exploring a sound world which bewitched him into some excesses and formal clumsiness but from which promising and interesting textures emerged. Young composers need second performances and the chance of further commissions: one hopes that the New Music Players will also serve the most recent prizewinners.

The two 'themes' I noticed in the Festival — of solo virtuosity and of folk-inspired music — to some extent overlapped. In the virtuoso category we had recitals from Vinko Globokar (trombone), Harry Sparnaay (bass clarinet), Frederic Rzewski (piano) and James Wood (percussion) to compare, and a fascinating comparison it was.

Globokar in his talk showed that finding new techniques for instrumental music is important and that virtuosity helps towards this aim. His recital showed how much he has to drive himself, stimulate himself, by improvisatory techniques which continually extend the range of what can be done. The alternative — 'One could write notes, I suppose', as he said whimsically — is not for him. His own pieces *Echanges* and *Res/As/Ex/Ins-pirer* both showed the virtuoso player pushing himself to the limits, but the works themselves impressed more as just technical exercises. Globokar's theatrical piece *Toucher* for percussionist (performed by James Wood) had virtuosity, a text and a theatricality harnessed to make, enjoyably, a philosophical point about the artist, the innovator and the world: the finding of truth and its reception — a point central to Globokar's own philosophy of music-making. Globokar himself showed in his performance of Kagel's *Atem* the deep thought he gives to the works of other composers.

Harry Sparnaay perhaps still revels in the challenges of new techniques for their own sakes. Rzewski, in fact, perceptively remarked that all the works Sparnaay played interposed an element between the player and his instrument and the audience — a huge score, electronic equipment, theatricality — as if he prefers a challenge from the difficulties themselves rather than the interpretation of the work to the audience. Certainly Sparnaay's performance of *Atem* was less subtle than that of Globokar (but how fascinating to hear both within a couple of days). He revelled, however, in the almost insurmountable technical difficulty of Brian Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study I*, and in the pieces with tape, which included the world première of Lyell Cresswell's *Hocket*, an enjoyable work using tape delay with some obvious humour in its opening moments, but some more thoughtful music in its inner sections.

James Wood's recital included no music by himself and nor was any played by other performers (a chance missed?), but in the concert which ended with *Toucher* he gave Stockhausen's *Zyklus* and *A First Show*, a newish work by Dominic Muldowney: a live performance with tape allowing 'group' performance on vibraphone and marimba (the performer records the accompanying tapes himself) and a piece which grew upon one as it proceeded.

Frederic Rzewski's performance of his own *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* was the highlight of the Festival. The astonishing variety and virtuosity of these 36 variations on the Chilean song make them virtually an encyclopedia of Western Music to date. Virtuosity combined with compositional acuity made this the most satisfying musical statement of the week. Interestingly, but perhaps indicative of current trends, this was the only overtly political piece in the whole Festival. Attempts to make the performers talk about music in political terms in discussion periods failed.

It was also interesting to hear, in Rzewski's well-argued lecture, an insistence on the rediscovery of folk music and on a return to such musical roots in modern composition. Certainly his own music showed this, not only in the variations but in the *Four Pieces* which he also played, although their greatest interest was in the exploration of the sound of the piano itself. The Festival mirrored the folk-music trend in several of the concerts. The only visiting group, Acezantez from Yugoslavia, attempt in some of their work to unite older Yugoslavian music with modern techniques, including elements of theatre. On their showing at Huddersfield, however, their whole approach for a semi-improvisatory group is not really rigorous enough. Lutoslawski's folk-inspired *Dance Preludes* were vigorously played by Colin Lawson (clarinet) and Peter Hill (piano); Margaret Field presented a whole evening of songs of the jazz era, accompanied by Douglas Young; and the Festival ended with a recital of music based on folk music of several countries by Young and Rohan de Saram. It even included a demonstration of Singhalese drumming by de Saram. The final item, rather curiously for a contemporary music festival, was the *Suite populaire espagnole* by Falla, played with great panache at 11.30 pm to an exhausted but appreciative and still sizeable audience. This must have been manna to the soul of the indefatigable Richard Steinitz.

NOTE:

¹In *Contact 20* (Autumn 1979), pp. 46-50.

PHILIP GLASS'S SATYAGRAHA ROTTERDAM, SEPTEMBER 5-6, 1980

KEITH POTTER

Musically speaking, Holland often seems, from our shores, to be excitingly radical: open to the new, to the experimental, even to the lavishly expensive avantgarde experience (after all, the Dutch still seem to have the money). Two years ago the Holland Festival had visits from Cage, Kagel and Stockhausen in the same week; this year it's been among the first to mount parts of Stockhausen's music-drama *Licht*. And while acting as willing host to what must be the most grandiose operatic project since *The Ring*, the Netherlands have also initiated a few departures of their own in that now traditionally most conservative medium. I well remember the 'circus opera' *Houdini* by Peter Schat (the nearest thing the Dutch have to Peter Maxwell Davies) in 1977: a veritable annus mirabilis for Dutch opera which also saw the premières of Hans Kox's *Dorian Gray* and *Axel*, a jointly composed venture by Jan van Vlijmen and Reinbert de Leeuw.

One of the ways in which Holland differs so markedly from Britain is by its support for the American repetitive, systemic or process musicians, call them what you will. The 'minimal music composers', as the Dutch still insist on calling them, have gone down almost embarrassingly well there. Steve Reich has been a hit in Holland for years; La Monte Young and Terry Riley have both visited (which is more than they ever have here, at least during the last decade or so). Some years ago there was a special festival for the minimalists, to which even some British representatives were invited.

The only American process composer to have indulged in operatic or at least theatrical ventures so far is Philip Glass. Holland was quick to mount his first 'opera' *Einstein on the Beach*. And now the City of Rotterdam has been responsible for the commissioning of a second, *Satyagraha*, written for the Netherlands Opera Company and premiered in Rotterdam's Stadsschouwburg on September 5. Dutch devolution being what it is, the opera was seen in Utrecht, Scheveningen and Amsterdam by the end of its run on September 23.

Einstein on the Beach, a collaboration between Glass and Robert Wilson first performed in 1976, was not so much an opera, more a five-hour extravaganza (for a company of 21, who have to sing, act and dance, a solo singer, a solo violinist — who represents Einstein himself — and the composer's regular ensemble of amplified flutes, saxophones and electric organs) in four continuous acts which has no plot in any conventional sense and in which the presumed hero is sought rather than found.

The hero of *Satyagraha* is Mahatma Gandhi: unambiguously so in that, visually at least, he is a 'realistic' operatic character sung by a conventional operatic tenor. He appears in all seven scenes of the opera's three acts and is variously surrounded by other very real-looking characters — a wife, a secretary, co-workers both Indian and European — who perform ordinary activities: working on a farm, working on a newspaper, engaging in demonstrations of peaceful protest. The plot of the opera is concerned with the story of the years Gandhi spent in South Africa at the turn of the century, before his more famous exploits in India. *Satyagraha* is the name of the movement Gandhi formed to practise what is commonly known as 'passive resistance'; it was directed at European racial discrimination against Indians living in South Africa with some eventual success.

In other ways, too, the opera *Satyagraha* is quite traditional. Glass has deliberately chosen to write for the forces to be found in the average opera house: nine singing parts for the usual range of male and female soloists, three non-singing parts, a chorus (not large) and an orchestra modest and normal in every respect except that there is a prominent part for electric organ. There are traditional operatic set-pieces: big arias in which Gandhi stirs up the Indian crowd to burn their registration cards in a ceremonial protest against the repressions of the Black Act or, at the end of the opera, sums up the power of *Satyagraha* to overcome evil with the aid of religion; the offstage chorus which begins the last act (and which is curiously reminiscent, to English ears, of Holst's 'Neptune' from *The Planets* in both harmonic character and mood).

So far so conventional; and *Satyagraha*'s traditional virtues should do a great deal to endear it to any operagoer who likes Massenet or Puccini, say, as well as Holst. But where Glass and his librettist, the American novelist Constance DeJong, score most particularly and most powerfully is in the ways in which these reassuringly familiar aspects of both drama and music are combined with the more radical ones, redefining the old in the context of the new. For the characters in *Satyagraha* are not 'real' in the sense of having real dialogue with one another in a language which the audience understands. The entire libretto is drawn from the *Bhagavad-Gita* (part of the vast Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*) which, as Gandhi's 'dictionary of daily reference', relates with ease to the more clearly narrative aspects of each scene as a kind of philosophical commentary; the cast sings in Sanskrit from DeJong's own phonetic translation. Another important aspect of the opera which brings it closer to the genre of 'radical interior drama' than to conventional, exterior realism is the 'figurative counterpart' watching over each act from a high platform at the back of the stage: Leo Tolstoy, Rabindranath Tagore and Martin Luther King are the three silent roles representing the *Satyagraha* movement's past, present and future — a brilliant dramatic stroke.

Musically, too, *Satyagraha* combines the diaphanous diatonic euphony familiar from much process music with the rigorous additive rhythmic structures derived from Indian music which have been an essential feature of Glass's compositions for the last decade or so. The opera contains some of his best music to date; the difference from his earlier work lies largely in the fact that it is filtered through the familiar textures of late Romantic operatic vocal line and full opera orchestra to make a new and refreshing synthesis of unfamiliar manner and familiar means.

Glass's debut with 'conventional' opera in the conventional opera house was enthusiastically acclaimed in Rotterdam on the first night, and already Stuttgart Opera has not only scheduled it but also requested another; it looks very much as though the composer may now devote himself largely to opera. The Netherlands company has made a very good job of the first production, with some fine sets and costumes by Robert Israel, a moving Gandhi, vocally extremely consistent over a four-hour evening, from Douglas Perry and a cast and orchestra under Bruce Ferden which had settled much more happily to the score by the second night. Since the producer was David Pountney, shortly to take over at ENO, it is perhaps not too much to hope that England may yet benefit from Holland's enterprise.

NEW MUSIC DIARY

BRIGITTE SCHIFFER

Tuesday April 3, 1979

Richard Stilgoe, the entertainer and television personality, was the star of a Gala Concert given in Leicester by the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra and Massed Junior Schools Choir. He recited Ogden Nash's verses to Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* and scored a success that was not even equalled by that of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. The main musical attraction of the concert was the world premiere of Douglas Young's *Journey between Two Worlds* for solo voice, double treble choir, steel band, rock group, hand bells, children's recorder and percussion group and a large orchestra, commissioned by the Leicester School of Music. It was performed, or so it seemed, by all the children of the region, and it was a tremendous affair, a joyful and boisterous occasion which was a delight for the parents and a challenge to the children. Peter Fletcher conducted with great authority and succeeded in drawing a remarkable performance from the young people, but what Young had hoped to attain — a vast co-ordination of all the groups, their entries and their movements — would have needed a Bernstein and, thank God, Fletcher is not that. Neither is Young, but together they succeeded in building up some spectacular climaxes without, however, achieving the balance that would have welded the different episodes into a unified whole. All the same, the immense effort put into the realisation of this ambitious project was plainly justified by the enjoyment of all concerned, and the event will be remembered by the young musicians as a unique experience.

Sunday April 22

London audiences were lucky in being given the opportunity to hear Márta Fábàn, the distinguished Hungarian cimbalom player, in a concert at the Riverside Studios. Over the years people have become used to identifying this instrument with folk and peasant music, but a number of young Hungarian composers have drawn inspiration from Fábàn's astonishing skills and the programme contained a number of recent works, most of them new to this country.

As István Lang's *Improvisation* for solo cimbalom unfolds, big gushes of sound are hurled through space and thrown against a barrier of brass tremolandos played at great speed and with great vigour. There are also delicate decorations and powerful rhythmic accents and, in the hands of this remarkable artist, Lang's *Improvisation* turns into a piece of extraordinary appeal and character. In József Soproni's *Tre Pezzi* for flute and cimbalom, the contrast between the fluidity of the woodwind instrument and reverberation of the plucked and pedalled string instrument was expertly exploited by the composer, and the flute exquisitely played by Tihamér Elek who was also the soloist in a *Soliloquium* for flute by Zoltán Jeney. András Ligeti was the brilliant interpreter of György Kurtág's Eight Duos for violin and cimbalom, pieces that were marked by passionate outbursts and delicate filigrees, lyrical statements and melodious interludes in which both instruments joined. The programme ended with Miklós Kocsár's highly romantic *Replique*, in which the composer achieved a fusion of cimbalom and flute, turning the resulting sound into a medium of great expressive intensity.

Wednesday May 2

As everyone knows, the English Bach Festival isn't what it used to be and hasn't been for quite some time. No longer do we congregate in Oxford for those sensational Xenakis retrospectives or on the South Bank for Stockhausen and Messiaen. Instead we congregate at Covent Garden to hear spectacular revivals of Rameau operas. Contemporary music has become a sideline, which was dealt with this year in a day of contemporary music to mark the 75th anniversary

of the birth and 30th anniversary of the death of Nikos Skalkottas'. Two concerts took place, one in the Purcell Room and another, later in the evening, in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. The four composers represented in both programmes were Benjamin Britten, György Ligeti, Nikos Skalkottas and Nigel Osborne, the last of whom is no longer a discovery but was the only newcomer, and a good choice too.

Britten's *Phantasy Quartet*, Op. 2 (1932) and Ligeti's Cello Sonata Sonata (1948-53) are early works of no more than documentary interest. The Dartington Quartet also played Britten's Third String Quartet, Op. 94, and Ligeti's Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet were played by members of the English Bach Festival Ensemble. As for Skalkottas, he was represented by his Third String Quartet, his Duo for violin and cello and the Andante Sostenuto from his Third Piano Concerto, a 22-minute long movement of which Marika Papayannou gave a moving and memorable performance.

In the first concert Rohan de Saram played *Quasi una Fantasia* for cello solo by Nigel Osborne, a work commissioned by the EBF, which was inspired by Adorno and is dedicated to the memory of Skalkottas, with a sideglance at Theodorakis and Weill. Barely eight minutes long, the piece consists of small sections each of them containing a meaningful statement. Osborne's idiom is one of deep emotion and intense commitment, both conveyed by the cellist with great intensity.

In Osborne's *Prelude and Fugue* for four winds, four strings, piano and percussion (1975), played in the later concert, human relationships are explored and translated into a number of games governed by a set of rules and played out in a casual way between the individual musicians. On one level it is a study in communication; on another it is concerned with the poetics of structuralism; and on yet another, purely auditive, one it results in an ambiguous and shimmering fluidity, set off by some powerful outbursts and some very sparse and strangely contrasting episodes. The English Bach Festival Ensemble, under Yannis Ioannides, gave a strong performance of this seductive work, which was projected with great directness and well received by the audience.

On the same day, the Leicester Schools Symphony Orchestra and the Leicester Chorale joined the choristers of Westminster Cathedral for one of the New Macnaghten Concerts, which featured the *Shire Suite* by Michael Tippett, the *Missa Brevis* by Benjamin Britten, various arrangements of Charles Ives by Douglas Young and *Arcana* by Edgard Varèse. There were also two first performances: *In Parenthesis* by George Newson, commissioned by the New Macnaghten Concerts and giving the different sections of the orchestra challenging and rewarding tasks to fulfil; and *Feux d'Artifice* by Douglas Young, four minutes of juggling with irregular speeds, changing registers and variable dynamics — a clever little piece, played with great virtuosity by the young musicians under the competent direction of Peter Fletcher.

Friday May 4

The young American guitarist David Starobin and his ensemble (Rosalind Rees, soprano, Susan Palma, flute, and Susan Jolles, harp) introduced themselves at the Wigmore Hall with a programme featuring the premieres of works by Tod Machover (b. 1953) and Meyer Kupferman (b. 1926), and first British performances of pieces by William Bland (b. 1947) and Barbara Kolb (b. 1939). Starobin is one of those performers who inspire young composers and we read in the programme notes that he has had more than 70 works written especially for him.

The eight-minute solo piece written for him by Bland, *A Fantasy Homage to Tomas Luis de Victoria*, is 'an etude in tremolo techniques', quoting extensively from Victoria and using traditional guitar devices. The strange combination of guitar and harp, chosen by Kupferman for his *Fantasy Duo*, subtitled 'Sound Objects VII', yields some very personal sound pictures of a fragile, evocative beauty, so that the composer's description of the piece as a dream journey seems entirely adequate.

Machover, a pupil of Carter and Sessions presently engaged in electronic research at IRCAM, contributed a short piece for guitar and tape called *Déplacements*, mainly concerned with 'the relationship between the abstract and unyielding tape and the striving guitar'. A ghost dimension emerges from the tape which combines with the live instrument in a way both highly imaginative and of great

technical expertise.

The programme also contained pieces by Maxwell Davies, Toru Takemitsu and Stravinsky, but it was the 23-minute cycle *Songs before an Adieu* for soprano, flute and guitar, specially written by the young American composer Barbara Kolb for Starobin and Rosalind Rees, which met with the keenest interest. The accompaniment sets the mood for each song: small, ostinato-like patterns on the guitar depict the desolate flatness of a November morning ('Sentence'); a narrow network of lines (flute and guitar) surround the melody, sustaining e. e. cummings's words ('Now I lay'); soft arabesques and deep chords (flute and guitar) express frustration and disappointment ('Cantata'); agitated runs and flourishes of the flute form a background to the dramatic dialogue between a voice (spoken by the guitarist) and the soprano ('Gluttonous smoke'); the grave sound of the alto flute and some decorative guitar playing set the words of Guillaume Apollinaire ('Adieu'), beautifully sung by Rosalind Rees. The four songs have a strong impressionist flavour. Their deliberate simplicity is of a progressive kind and does not exclude a certain complexity of thought and idea, but it communicates well and was greatly appreciated by the audience at the Wigmore Hall.

Monday May 14

The unfortunate choice of the Purcell Room for a concert by the Aulos Ensemble proved, if not fatal, at least decisively detrimental to the works performed, especially to Philip Wilby's *Et Resurrexit Christus*, a work of 45 minutes' duration scored for three sopranos, five instruments, percussion, piano and chamber organ. It is intended for performance during the devotions of Holy Week and is designed for performance in a church. Nothing could be farther removed from the acoustics and the spiritual background of a church than the Purcell Room, and much of the essence of the work was, no doubt, missed by an audience which had already listened to over 40 minutes of modern music and was, by the time the *Resurrexit* started, already in a state of acute saturation. The work is in three parts: 'Ground', the first section, which deals with the event of Good Friday in a sombre and subdued mood; 'Psalm', the second section, an extended and at times passionate lamentation written for one unaccompanied solo voice; and a jubilant 'Resurrexit Christus', the final section, which describes the resurrection of a living and immortal Christ. The sound may be modern and daring enough, but the thought behind it is entirely traditional, a discrepancy which may well explain Wilby's problem with musical language. By keeping closely to the original text and by illustrating the story step by step, Wilby allows the audience to follow and participate. The highpoints are mostly associated with the voices: the Seven Words on the Cross, set for three sopranos, and the Psalm, beautifully sung by Jean Knibbs, who was also the soloist in the third section. The composer conducted the excellent Aulos Ensemble, which gave a moving performance of this genuinely religious 'oratorio'.

Sette Spaci by John Buller, a piece for two winds, two strings and piano which opened the programme, consists of seven sections, each of them built around a seven-note chord that generates some intriguing webs of delicately intertwining lines, occasionally interrupted by the harsh sound of some dramatic piano statements. It is a pretty piece, 13 minutes long, delicate and subtle, readily enjoyed and easily forgotten. A beautiful motet, *Cum Natus Esset*, and the rather uncharacteristic *Kammermusik 3* by Hindemith complete the attractive but over-long and over-ambitious programme devised by Wilby.

Wednesday May 16

It is hard to understand how one of the most interesting events of the month, an 'American Music Study Day' including three lectures, a lunchtime recital and an evening concert to celebrate George Crumb's 50th birthday, could pass almost unnoticed. Very few people took the trouble to find their way through the labyrinthine Barbican to the Guildhall School of Music and the first lecture, by Robin Maconie, on 'The Image in American Music', had to be cancelled for lack of attendance, although one would have thought that at least the students at the School would have shown some interest. The two afternoon lectures, one by Richard Steinitz on the music of George Crumb and the other

by Janice Hamer on 'America and the East', were given to an audience of five, myself included!

Even the lunchtime recital, given by such outstanding artists as Margaret Field (soprano), Rohan de Saram (cello) and the One plus One violin and viola duo did not draw a much larger audience for a programme composed mainly of songs by Schoenberg, Varèse, Roussel, Ives, Weill, Sondheim and Gershwin, most of them unknown in this country. It also included two works by Christian Wolff; the world première of his nostalgically Yankee *Rock about* and a strangely compelling Duo for Violins, both played by the excellent One plus One duo, Elisabeth Perry and Alexander Balanescu, and the London première of *Two Asanas* for piano by Janice Hamer, who intuitively caught the Eastern mood of timelessness and contemplation.

The George Crumb 50th birthday concert, given by members of Douglas Young's Dreamtiger ensemble, turned out to be an event of major importance, not to be forgotten by the privileged few who availed themselves of this rare opportunity to hear works by Crumb covering the period from 1955 to 1976. Three works by other composers were also included in the programme: Salvatore Sciarrino's short *All'Aure in una Lontanza* for solo flute, composed principally of shimmering harmonic tremoli; Colin McPhee's piano transcriptions of Balinese ceremonial music; and Douglas Young's *Lignes* for piano and claves, a study in articulation and phasing counteracted effectively by the static action of the claves.

Even in Crumb's first published work, his early Cello Sonata, there is already a hint of what was to come later, of the powerful imagination of a composer whose imagery is of an entirely personal kind and who is able to invent new performing techniques, draw new sounds from old instruments and stretch the means of expression to their utmost in order to realise his specific aural fantasies. Crumb has no models and belongs to no school, and his music does not show any influences. Having by-passed the post-serialists, he plunged without any hesitation into a world of textures and dreams, gestures and rituals of a very personal kind. His strange, sometimes exotic, often theatrical, always fascinating soundscapes can often be realised by a single instrument (as in the Cello Sonata), by a duo of violin and piano (the *Four Nocturnes*), by nothing more than a flute, cello and piano (*Vox Balaenae*) or, at the utmost, by two strings, piano and percussion (*Dream Sequence*), and each time the effect is charged with emotion and an electric undercurrent of excitement. The piano is occasionally drawn into a virtuoso display of percussive, resonant, melodious and sharply plucked sonorities, the flute can be ghosted by the voice and the cello is enriched by harmonics, glissandi and other sounds of an eerie, unreal character. The resulting imagery is irresistibly compelling, sometimes haunting, with dark forebodings, sometimes magical, with celestial visions. Emotion is the essence of Crumb's music, communication its key. For some the strong and immediate appeal of his music is suspicious; some object to his popular success, others miss the austerity of a Xenakis or the complexity of a Carter. I must confess to succumbing unreservedly to this kind of musical incantation, which projects all the more strongly when interpreted by such exceptional musicians as Rohan de Saram, the flautist Kathryn Lukas and their colleagues from the Dreamtiger ensemble. The American Study Day was a remarkable achievement on the part of Douglas Young as organiser, and pianist. The opportunity to discuss him as a composer must await another occasion.

Sunday June 17

For their anniversary concert in the RFH the London Symphony Orchestra commissioned Andrzej Panufnik (b. 1914) to write a work to be played without a conductor. A similar commission had been given by the London Sinfonietta to Nigel Osborne for a concert in the QEH only four months earlier, on February 21, and the memory of this work is still fresh enough in my mind to invite a comparison between the individual approach of the two composers to their respective tasks.

Osborne, when writing his 16-minute *In Camera* for 13 instruments (the thirteen principals of the London Sinfonietta), kept in mind the request for 'a piece of real chamber music': he first stressed the social aspect of a dialogue between different groups, then designed an

elaborate interplay between solo and tutti, and finally allowed the guitar to dominate the scene as a brilliant soloist, finding challenging roles for each single instrument on the way and taking considerable risks which added to the element of suspense.

Panufnik, on the other hand, wrote a representative orchestral piece designed to achieve maximal display and minimal risk, and which was therefore always on the safe side, the side of the establishment, who got rich dividends for their daring initiative in commissioning a contemporary composer. Panufnik's *Concerto Festivo*, 15 minutes long, consists of three movements: a solemn brass fanfare, a lyrical centrepiece for strings and woodwind and an exuberant finale called 'giocoso', culminating in a boisterous and resounding tutti. In this case it was not each individual player but each section which was given some spectacular task, and problems, for both the performers and the audience, were carefully avoided. Nothing could have been more adequate for the occasion than this essay in orchestral virtuosity, which was brilliantly played and enthusiastically applauded.

The same day, twelve cellists from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra gave a concert next door, in the QEH, which consisted mainly of minor works by unknown composers such as Klengel, Eder and David Howland, as well as a suite by César Franck, a *Bachianas Brasileiras* by Villa-Lobos and a suite by Boris Blacher: tit-bits suitable for whetting the appetite but leaving an uncomfortable and frustrating void. The Park Lane Group no doubt prevailed on the musicians to play some of their more demanding pieces, commissioned from, among others, Stockhausen and Xenakis, but one must assume that they were prepared neither to make the effort nor to take any chances.

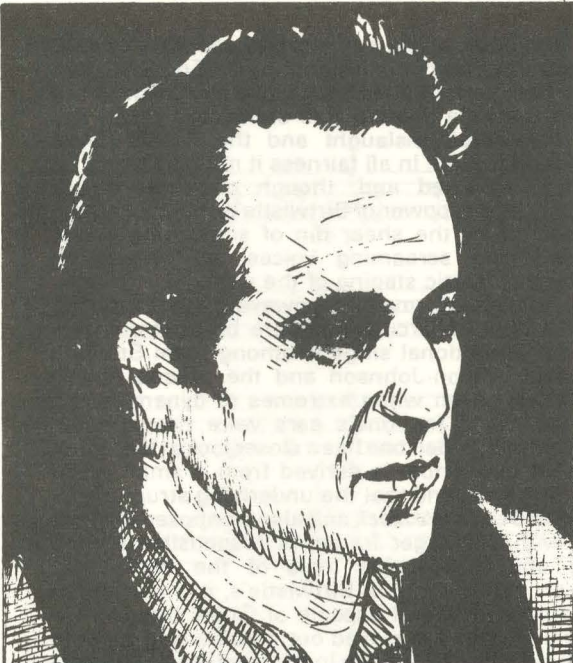
Monday June 25 and Wednesday June 27

The most important event of this year's Festival of English Music at Christ Church Spitalfields, was the first London performance of Michael Finnissy's *Goro* for tenor and six instruments by the Nash Ensemble, who had premièred the work a few weeks earlier at the Bath Festival, for which it had been commissioned. In the programme notes Finnissy tells us that the piece is based on a nagauta, 'a form of shamisen music, meaning "extended song" but closer to dramatic recitation'. In view of the fact that the shamisen is a string instrument, not a vocal style or form, it is difficult to see its connection with extended song or dramatic recitation and, considering the highly un-Japanese delivery of the text, it is equally difficult to see why the words should not have been sung in English. As the links with the text are of the loosest kind anyway — the strident clarinet in B flat is called upon to illustrate a section concerned with the spring breeze, a nightingale and love, whereas the preceding section, calling for just retribution and sinister revenge, is set for voice, alto flute and harp — one would do better to treat this deeply poetic and, in parts, very beautiful work as a piece of pure music and ignore its exotic origin as well as its violent subject matter.

The 20-minute piece is divided into seven sections, each with its own very sparse, almost austere instrumentation. Long, wide-ranging and highly melismatic vocal solos, big swirls of sound cut off by long silences, delicate arabesques of harp with viola or flute and shimmering textures and mysterious drones, achieved by the most economical means, remain in one's memory. *Goro* is a piece of great imagination, evocative of some strange ritual and full of theatrical gestures. In this respect one is, at moments, reminded of Britten's church opera *Curlew River*, also based on a Japanese legend and making use of similar instrumental forces. In both works the harp adds to the soundscape a note of magic and mystery, unrelated to Japan but of an irresistible appeal.

The concert, which had started with a brilliant performance of Bliss's Clarinet Quintet (with Anthony Pay), ended in a light vein with Robin Holloway's *Serenade in C*. Each member of the Nash Ensemble ought to be mentioned separately, but, for lack of space, I will only name the excellent young tenor Alastair Thompson, who sang the vocal part of *Goro* with great skill and genuine musicality.

Two days later, we were treated by the Spitalfields Festival to a world première, a cycle of songs called *Variations*, commissioned by the Festival, written by Elisabeth Lutyens on poems of Ursula Vaughan Williams and presented with unflinching musicianship and



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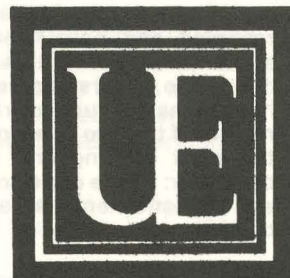
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commitment by Jane Manning (soprano) and Richard Rodney Bennett (piano). In these songs, describing the passage from winter to spring, there is little contrast, tension or variety but much lyrical thought and some textures of great delicacy. The music, concerned with moods rather than with images, succeeded in holding the attention for 47 minutes: no mean achievement.

Tuesday June 26 and Saturday June 30

In a programme judiciously devised by Julian Dawson-Lyell for a piano recital he gave in the Purcell Room, the new works were put into the context of modern classics. These terms of reference turned out to be particularly relevant in the case of Christopher Bochmann (b. 1950), whose Sonata No. 2, *Sanctus*, 'based formally on the syntactic structure of the Sanctus and Benedictus movement of the Mass' and tightly held together within a framework of self-imposed laws and limitations, was preceded by Schoenberg's Three Pieces, Op. 11. Berio's highly atmospheric *Wasserklavier* and *Erdenklavier* were followed by Skryabin's Ninth Sonata, prefaced by a charming little *Albumblatt*, both played with great transparency and colour.

For the performance of Milko Kelemen's *Dessins commentés*, seven piano pieces inspired by Henri Michaux, Dawson-Lyell was well served by his familiarity with extended piano techniques. Every resource of the instrument had been mobilised by Kelemen in order to catch the flavour as well as the thought of the poems, and every modern piano device was used by the pianist in order to create a kaleidoscopic vision of individual pieces marked by some very effective improvisatory gestures.

The second part of the programme, which opened with a study by Stephen Oliver, ended with an exhilarating performance of Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata. The whole evening was a model of intelligent and high-spirited music making. More concerts of this kind would help considerably in overcoming the general suspicion towards new music.

All this, of course, is idle talk or rather wishful thinking, because what the public really wants are concerts like the one given by the London Chorale in the QEH the following Saturday, when they presented a programme composed of Mendelssohn's Overture *Fingal's Cave*, Fauré's Requiem and the first performance of David Bedford's *Of Beares, Foxes and Many, Many Wonders*. The work is scored for four winds, two strings, a large percussion section and mixed choir and divided into two parts, 'Autumn' and 'Winter'. Lasting some 20 minutes, it is 'the setting of part of the account by the chronicler Gerrit de Veer of the search by William Barents for a northeast passage to Cathay. Stranded on the coast of Novaya Zemlya in 1596, their ship crippled by pack ice, Barents and his tiny crew were the first men in history to face the bitter cold and endless night of an Arctic winter, utterly alone...' but, unlike *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars, who attempted a minute-by-minute reconstruction of the event, this is simply a description of the catastrophe, relating the plight of the men in a simple, straightforward, tonal language. The devices used are old and approved and so are the influences (Hindemith and Walton). Though the common chord has been acceptable again for quite some time and though the quotation of a Renaissance chorale (Praetorius's *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*) seems suitable enough to evoke Christmas in the Arctic, what makes the work so undistinguished is the absence of anything by which to remember it. Even those who applauded so vigorously will be hard put to remember a single tune or hum any of the melodies they apparently so enjoyed.

Friday June 29

All other events of the month were eclipsed by a concert in which the London Sinfonietta gave a superb performance of Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*, subsequently recorded and now released thus making available an authentic version of this still almost unknown opera. It is difficult to understand how such a formidable work could have remained unperformed for over ten years and why neither of the two London opera houses have staged one of the most exciting and important operas by any living composer: all the more so in that it requires only six singers and 16 instrumentalists and would therefore be easy on the budget.

Punch and Judy, a one-act opera of one hour and 40 minutes' duration, was commissioned by the English Opera Group. The first performance took place at Aldeburgh in 1968, when the little Jubilee Hall shuddered under the impact of the aural onslaught and the 'locals' were dumbstruck and fearful. In all fairness it must be said that everyone was shocked and, though one was struck spontaneously by the power of Birtwistle's sound imagery, one was put off by the sheer din of screeching brass, wailing wind and screaming voices, an impression increased by the drastic staging of the work.

In the latest performance, however, all the subtle shades and lyrical undercurrents were brought out by a team of quite exceptional singers, among them Stephen Roberts, David Wilson-Johnson and the unique Phyllis Bryn-Julson, and even when extremes of dynamics and register were called for, one's ears were never tested beyond endurance. When one has a closer look at the score, one finds that every note is derived from a small set of pitches and intervals and that the underlying structure, as tight as that of Berg's *Wozzeck* and also composed of small set pieces within a larger frame, is responsible for the compelling and inescapable logic of the work. Like *Tragoedia*, an earlier work of Birtwistle's, it is concerned with the ritual and formal aspects of Greek tragedy. On another level dreams are played out, traditions brought in and one is held with an iron grip in the spell of this 'tragic comedy or comical tragedy', for which Stephen Pruslin, the well-known pianist, wrote the strange and highly formalised libretto. David Atherton conducted this extraordinary performance, in which every single member of the London Sinfonietta surpassed themselves in precision and virtuosity: a memorable occasion for which congratulations are due to the organiser, the conductor and all the participants.

Saturday July 7

Lysis is a new and variable chamber ensemble built around a nucleus of three people: Roger Dean, piano, double-bass and vibraphone (the director of the group); Ashley Brown, percussion; and Hazel Smith, violin. A concert they gave in the Purcell Room started very promisingly with a lively performance of one of Hindemith's most enjoyable and endearing little *Kammermusiken* of the 20s, the Three Pieces for five instruments, which was followed by Finnis's eight-minute *Ru Tchou* for solo percussionist, an exciting piece of ceremonial drumming in which sections of varying density, dynamic, register and timbre, full of contrast and drama, are separated from each other by long and tense silences characteristic of ritual music from the Far East.

Lyell Cresswell's beautiful cantilena for trumpet, violin and double-bass, *Waiata Tungi*, based on a Maori lament and decorated with flourishes and arabesques, provided a welcome change from the virtuoso drum-tapping and beating of the preceding piece. This commissioned work would have formed a perfect ending to the first part of the evening, but two more pieces had to be heard before the interval: a short group improvisation and a long Violin Sonata by Charles Ives, played by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean.

Though Theo Lovendie's *Music for contrabass and piano* (1971) was full of clever ideas, there was not much more to the piece than some new techniques, some not-so-new gimmicks and a brilliant display of virtuosity, strongly influenced by jazz-playing and improvisation. The only other new piece on the programme, an eight-minute *Variation for Ensemble*, written for Lysis by John Wallace, started in an entertaining way but deteriorated gradually and outstayed its welcome.

July: St. Bartholomew's Festival

The following day, July 8, the 1979 St. Bartholomew's Festival started with a lunchtime organ recital by Andrew Morris, who played works by Augustin Bloch, Miroslav Miletic, Simon Preston, Pal Karolyi and Herbert Howells as well as one of the four works by Paul Patterson included in the festival programme. The other recitals were given by Erika Wardenburg (harp), Monique Copper (piano), Karen Jensen (soprano), Rose Andrieser (guitar) and the violin and piano duo of György Pauk and Peter Frankl. Most of them

included in their programmes one of Berio's eight solo *Sequenze*, which were all performed during the seven festival days, and each event featured one or two items of special interest which attracted the audience and formed the core of the programme.

It was mainly the UK premiere of Barbara Kolb's *Three Place Settings*, with her *Homage to Keith Jarrett and Gary Burton*, which brought the public to the Anglo-American concert by the Lontano Ensemble on July 9, which I was unfortunately unable to attend. *Turenas* for quadruphonics tape, by John Chowning of Stanford University — a wizard with placing sounds in space — and Stanley Haynes's *Prisms* for piano and computer-synthesised tape, with its smooth transfer from acoustic to electronic sound, were the main attractions of the concert of electronic and computer music on July 10, which was organised and prepared with all the 'know-how' required but seldom achieved on such occasions.

The main attraction of the SPNM concert on July 11, in which the Arditti String Quartet and the Double Red Ensemble participated, was, no doubt, Berio's recent *Sequenza VIII* for violin, perhaps slightly less adventurous but just as difficult and inventive as the previous ones. It was beautifully played by Irvine Arditti, whose technical expertise proved to be on the same high level as his interpretative abilities. There was also Dominic Muldowney's *4 from Arcady* for four oboes, a piece in seven sections which kept the mind busy with its ever-throbbing pulse and its ever-changing time, and with its contrasts between austerity and exuberance, rigidity and freedom, and playfulness and aggression. There is never a dull moment in this ten-minute piece, which consists of a kaleidoscope of small structures that are, in turn, juxtaposed, overlapped, synchronised and telescoped. Time passed fast and the end came only too soon.

Numerous were the attractions of the lunchtime concert given by the excellent Suoraan ensemble on July 14. There was a competent and imaginative performance of Berio's *Sequenza I* by the young American flautist Nancy Ruffer, and a fascinating interpretation by Michael Finnissy of the early six *Epigrams* for solo piano by Brian Ferneyhough which, though complex and demanding enough, were made to sound much more relaxed and approachable than his later pieces. We also heard the first performance of Richard Emsley's *At Once* for two woodwinds, piano and vibraphone, which was sometimes faintly reminiscent of gamelan music: seven minutes of tinkling and titillating sounds, of lines that proliferate and disperse and of structures that split and disintegrate. It was altogether a pretty piece, pleasant to listen to and agreeable to remember occasionally.

The principal feature of the concert, however, was the world premiere of *Night Ferry*, a work for mezzo-soprano (Josephine Nendick), two woodwinds, piano and percussion, commissioned by Suoraan from Nigel Osborne, a setting of words by the Ulster poet Tom Paulin, just five minutes long but of such dramatic impact that all else became immaterial and time stood still. Like most of Osborne's works, it is committed music of the highest order and, with its terrific violence, its delicate lyricisms and its expressive power, it calls to mind memories of Luigi Nono's *Epitaph auf Federico Garcia Lorca*, which so stunned its audience when first heard at Darmstadt in the 50s. In Osborne's piece, the voice passes imperceptibly from song to Sprechstimme and back to pitched recitation, to break into passionate outcries only twice, at moments of unbearable tension, whereas the drum beats on relentlessly, regardless of changes in landscape and mood, and will not be quietened until the very end, a tutti fortissimo of frightening intensity. Before this remarkable performance, Globokar's *Atemstudie* was thrown in for good measure, adding an extra dimension to a programme substantial and rewarding enough as it stood.

The Festival ended the same evening with a New Macnaghten Concert, given by Tony Coe's Axel and the Delmé String Quartet. The result was a sad mixture of so-called 'classical' music — Berg's String Quartet — and pseudo-improvised jazz, which succeeded neither in bridging gaps nor in establishing relationships and fell sadly between two stools.

Proms 1979

The 85th Season of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts lasted from July 20 to September 15, 1979. The BBC commissioned only two composers, Oliver Knussen and Nicholas Maw, but two more first performances of works by Anthony Payne and David Wooldridge were also included in the programme. Striking newness and originality of thought were not found amongst the new works, but rather among those of well established composers such as Berio, Birtwistle, Carter and Lutoslawski. It was a Prom season singularly void of surprises but with some remarkable programmes and some memorable single performances.

On July 30 — three days after they had given the British premiere of Crumb's *Star Child*, a piece which was ear-splitting rather than apocalyptic, irritating rather than grandiose — the BBC Symphony Orchestra, this time under David Atherton, presented another work by an American composer: Carter's *A Symphony of Three Orchestras*, one of the most demanding and most rewarding compositions of recent times. It had already been played in London once before, but this was an entirely new experience. During the 15 minutes of the performance the 'prommers' in the arena stood bolt upright. Not one of them sat down on the floor, as they so often do, or even as much as leant against the railings: so great was their concentration, so intense their listening that no one coughed, moved or relaxed until the last note was heard, and it was they, the young people from the arena, who applauded hardest, loudest and longest.

At the same concert Sir Michael Tippett conducted his oratorio *A Child of Our Time* — sensational when it was written, during the Second World War, but which has since lost much of its impact — and Lutoslawski conducted the first British performance of *Les espaces du sommeil*, the setting for baritone and orchestra of a text by the French surrealist poet Robert Desnos, written in 1975 for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and admirably sung that evening by John Shirley Quirk.

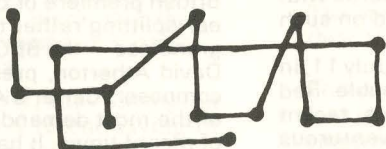
In this shimmering and dreamlike nocturne, the unrelated, disconnected and incongruous images ('le pas du promeneur et celui de l'assassin et celui du sergent de ville') are held together by the ever recurring 'Dans la nuit... il y a toi', set every time to different pitches but identical gestures; and the ambiguity of the words ('toi': the imaginary, invented, made-up, unreal figure of a loved one) is first reflected in the hazy texture of the instrumental interludes and then, suddenly, contradicted by the anticlimax of the last line, when the baritone sings suddenly on a very high pitch, after the perennial 'Dans la nuit', an entirely unexpected 'Dans le jour aussi'. End of a dream; breaking of dawn; sleep torn apart. A very strange and disturbing piece.

The younger generation of British composers was represented by a single name, that of Oliver Knussen: at the age of 27 still a 'promising' young talent, whose Third Symphony (September 6), commissioned by the BBC no less than six years ago but only now emerging from its various stages as a work in one movement lasting under a quarter of an hour (and not 30 minutes, as listed in the prospectus) is yet another 'promising' work — overbrimming with ideas and with youthful energy, a work of uncertain shape and unmarked identity. The most interesting aspect of the symphony is Knussen's handling of time — where he acknowledges his debt to Hitchcock — but as long as he is engaged with writing symphonies, he should come to terms with the dialectics of the symphonic idea before trying his hand at systemic processes and polyrhythmic structures.

Placed between Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky (of the French period), the work was given a sympathetic performance by the BBC SO, under the American conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, who underlined Knussen's 'French connections' to good effect.

French connections were also very much in evidence in the two concerts of Pierre Boulez' Ensemble Inter-contemporain, although only a single French work was featured in their programme: *Variants* by Patrick Marcland, a pleasantly undoctinaire essay in serial techniques, which was preceded by Berio's *Chemins IIb* for viola and small orchestra — a piece of strangely austere and uncharacteristic viola-playing dominated by a small

PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC



Volume 17, No. 2

Claudio Spies
Verschieden (A Lament for
Seymour Shifrin)

Milton Babbitt
Ben Weber (1919-1979)

Michela Mollia
"From Silence toward a New
Sonorous World"
(Franco Evangelisti, 1926-1980)

Elaine Barkin
play it AS it lays

David Burrows
Speaking and Singing

Stefan Wolpe
Thoughts on Pitch

Stuart Smith
A Portrait of Herbert Brün

Maurice Blanchot
Ars Nova

Walter Branchi & Renato Pedio
Speaking Sounds

Michael Eckert
Text and Form in Dallapiccola's
Goethe-Lieder

Marjorie Tichenor
onanalysis

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number of gestures and performed by Gerard Caussé with great vigour and self-denial.

In the second half of the programme the orchestra was joined by the John Alldis Choir for the first British performance of Harrison Birtwistle's ...*agm*... five months after its world premiere in Paris under Boulez. With Peter Eötvös, the new resident conductor of the Paris-based ensemble, the performance sounded equally precise and assured and communicated a sense of hieratic and monumental grandeur.

Set for 16 voices and three instrumental groups, ...*agm*... is cast in the mould of Sapphic poetry. Twice before, in 1965 (*Entr'actes and Sappho Fragments*) and 1968 (*Cantata*), the great poetess of Lesbos had been Birtwistle's source of inspiration, but on both occasions he had used translations and something undefinable had always eluded him. Having discovered that Sappho's poems are actually much more fragmented than the translations had suggested, he went back to the original for his investigation of the nature of the fragments, their tendency to cohere and their irresistible striving for unity.

The very idea of 'fragment' is embodied in the title. The three letters 'agm' are part of the word 'fragment' and of its Greek equivalent 'agma'. They are also contained in most of Sappho's words and are at the same time used as abbreviation for 'Agamemnon', associated with the hunting net of death, which Birtwistle identifies with the implacable Sapphic metre or 'stanza'. As it happens, most of the words included in the three sets of fragments chosen by Birtwistle from the so-called 'Crocodylopolis cries' of Fayoum contain only these three letters, which are set in the original Greek.

Unity is achieved by relating everything to a central pitch and a central pulse, and the metre, sole survivor of the partly accidental, partly deliberate fragmentation of the Sapphic papiri, provides the grid through which phrases, words or syllables can be fitted into sets and can be made to cohere.

The verse-like structure of the work, the juxtaposition of heavy blocks and the explosive climaxes, the violent contrasts and the uncompromising dissonances, all these are typical Birtwistle gestures. And yet there is something completely new in this work: a greater harmonic continuity, a greater limpidity in the hard-edged and hard-boned sound complexes, a lyrical streak deeply buried in the dark textures of heavy brass and low strings, and we are forcefully reminded that 'Sappho's stanza is merely a way of holding things together' and that 'her main concern was to present an apostrophe to love'. Birtwistle's work is all that: an apostrophe to love, a lasting monument to Sapphic poetry and a powerful piece, his greatest achievement and his most impressive work to date.

Monday October 1

Thérèse, a one-act opera by John Tavener, was commissioned by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden as far back as 1969 and was completed in 1976; its belated première took place on October 1. It is a many-levelled and many-layered work about the making of a saint and the making of an opera, also about the paradox of Thérèse as the 'little flower' of the Catholic church and the hard eyes of an ascetic that stared at Tavener from a photograph of her found some time ago. It was the posthumously published autobiography of Thérèse Martin (1873-97) which turned the uneventful life of this pious, sentimental, morbid and passionate girl into a 'cause célèbre' and led to her eventual canonisation, due to massive pressure of public opinion.

By introducing into the text such remote figures as Arthur Rimbaud and such unlikely locations as battlefields and concentration camps, Gerald McLarnon, Tavener's librettist, succeeded in turning the rather sordid story of Thérèse's life into a plot of action and suspense, almost a thriller, and provided the composer with all the ingredients of a successful traditional opera. Tavener responded appropriately: he wrote some potent orchestral interludes and some extended arias, held together by symbolism of the most basic kind, for which colossal forces were mobilised and use was made of the entire space of the Royal Opera House.

A look at the score reveals that the music also abounds in palindromes, circular and spiral devices, but what strikes the ear is the faux-naïf aspect of the strongly ritualistic Tavener sound — which appealed to many, but not to all. Edward Downes conducted a strong performance of the work, that benefited considerably from David Williams's imaginative production, Alan Barlow's clever sets and the outstanding achievement of the singers.

Friday October 5

Four days later, the world premiere of *An Actor's Revenge* took place at the Old Vic Theatre. A Japanese composer, Minoru Miki, had been commissioned by the English Music Theatre to write an opera and the project was viewed with some suspicion, based on the deeply ingrained Western fallacy that all thing ancient and alien should for ever remain in their original state and be denied all development and evolution: a suspicion that proved entirely unfounded and was quickly overcome.

An Actor's Revenge is based on the story of Yokinojo, a famous Kabuki actor, and the revenge he exacts on the three men responsible for the death of his parents. Set in the 18th century, the opera was conceived and staged in the tradition of the Kabuki theatre. The producer, Colin Graham, well versed in Eastern tradition through his collaboration on Britten's *Curlew River*, was assisted by Kinosuki Hanayagi, a noted exponent of Kabuki, who trained the English company previous to their performance, and what we heard was no cheap imitation of one kind or another.

The music played by the EMT ensemble of seven was neither pseudo-Eastern nor evocative and atmospheric, but of a style modern enough to incorporate certain melismatic and rhythmic gestures which have long since ceased to be the hallmark of the Far East and are eminently suitable for the accompaniment of the singers on the stage. Meanwhile, a Japanese ensemble of three (koto, shamisen and percussion) was seated separately and made a display of breath-taking virtuosity, accompanying the dances and playing occasional interludes. The costumes were genuinely Japanese, and the difficult part of the title role was sung in English by one actor and mimed in Japanese by another EMT actor. If all this suggests a mixture of incompatible elements, then I have badly failed to describe a musical experience that was entirely enchanting and that revealed new ways of rapprochement between East and West.

Tuesday October 9

Singcircle's first concert of the season in St. John's Smith Square. There is no need to stress the accomplishment of the singers, the musicianship of their director Gregory Rose or the competence of their sound-technician Simon Emmerson; their performance was impeccable. If only they weren't so serious, if only there was, occasionally, a spark of humour, if only they would, from time to time, let themselves go. Their total lack of theatricality was particularly conspicuous in the two pieces by Berio: *Sequenza III*, an essay in new virtuoso vocal techniques sung by the soprano Penelope Walmsley-Clark with great skill but little stage presence; and *The Cries of London*, a featherweight exercise in verbal manners and vocal gestures, which stood at the end of the programme and would have done very well as an encore.

Of the three new works, Emmerson's *Ophelia's Dream II* was by far the most substantial contribution: he was the only one to exploit to the full the vocal, dramatic and electro-acoustic potential of the ensemble, and the work's process of disintegration, achieved through gradual division, splitting up and subsequent transformation of the verbal material, had a haunting urgency that left a deep mark on the first performance of this Singcircle commission. Hugh Barton's *Fire and Rose* for five amplified voices added little to our experience of the genre and Jean-Claude Risset's *Inharmonique* for soprano and pre-recorded tape will mainly be remembered for the gentle singing of Lynda Richardson, which formed a telling contrast with the sound track.

Thursday October 11

It is not easy to explain how Jan Latham-Koenig, such a gifted young musician and such a good pianist, could have got his bearings so entirely wrong, but it must be said that his ensemble's concert in the Purcell Room was disappointing, though the programme had been planned with great care. Milhaud's *La création du monde*, requiring 18 players and including an important percussion section, was totally unsuitable for the hall and had an ear-splitting effect entirely due to the acoustic conditions, whereas Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony for 15 players without percussion however was not hampered by acoustics but rather by a strange misconception of style, through which Schoenberg was made to sound crisp and sharp, as if the work belonged to the Berlin of the late 20s, whereas Weill's *Dreigroschenmusik* sounded as nostalgic, languorous and romantic as if it belonged to the Schoenbergian Vienna of 1907. In between these two modern classics the ensemble played two works by Ferny: *Coloratura* for oboe and piano (Robin Canter and Latham-Koenig) and *Prometheus* for wind sextet, both beautifully played. The structure of the ensemble piece was articulated by three cadenzas, and what had seemed impenetrable in the confusing programme note became clear and audible in this well-prepared reading.

Wednesday October 24

A red-letter day, marked by the electrifying and memorable performance of *Eclat/Multiples*, one of Boulez' latest works in progress, which the BBC Symphony Orchestra played with admirable commitment under the composer's direction. The experience was unique in its gripping intensity, its spectacular colourfulness, its fantastic contrasts, surprises, intricacies. *Eclat/Multiples* grew out of *Eclat* (1965), an eight-minute work for nine non-sustaining instruments (piano, celesta, harp, glockenspiel, vibraphone, mandoline, guitar, cimbalom and tubular bells) and six sustaining instruments (viola, cello, flute, cor anglais, trumpet and trombone) that was to be extended by an as yet unspecified number of 'multiples', sections of growing complexity involving a growing number of sustaining instruments.

An entirely new section was to have turned this performance into a premiere, but what we actually heard was the approximately 30-minute version of 1970, scored for the non-sustaining nonet and the sustaining sextet with the addition of nine violas and one bass horn: i.e. a total of 25 instruments. Explosion, fragmentation and reflection of light: *Eclat/Multiples* was all that at the same time. The initial explosion burst on you with unprecedented vehemence, like a kind of super-firework; splinters of sound were caught up in uncontrollable turmoil, shafts of light were broken and reflected and glittering splashes of colour were set off by a display of dazzling virtuosity. The totally unpredictable interplay between the different and contrasting instrumental groups, the very *raison d'être* of the piece, resulted in an aural exercise of bewildering diversity. To have turned a work of such complexity and such rigorous aural logic into an exhilarating show-piece of instrumental virtuosity is in itself an achievement for which the concert will long be remembered by participants and listeners alike.

Thursday October 25

Two German guitarists, Wilhelm Bruck and Theodor Ross, gave a duo recital at the Goethe Institute. This was the first of a series of six programmes planned for the 1979-80 season, the latest extension of the British/German exchange concerts, devised with the purpose of providing more chances for young composers to have their music played and greater opportunities for musicians from both countries to meet one another and exchange experiences.

Bruck and Ross are intimately acquainted with the ideas and techniques of Kagel and have been performing his works for many years; with their performance of *Montage* they gave an excellent demonstration of what Kagel's 'Instrumentaltheater' is all about. Unlike what is known here as music-theatre, a combination of sound and action, of drama and music, Kagel's work achieves a complete identification of instrument and theatre, of acting

and instrumental playing so that the music itself is the theatre and the theatricality is part of the score. In a way Kagel's humour is of a very serious nature, and it would be a great mistake to see in this display of innocence and of childish games nothing but a bag of tricks: the invention is highly original, the effect highly stimulating and the skill involved — while alarm clocks, bull-roarers, bass harmonica and a whole arsenal of other noise-producing objects tick, buzz and ring — is quite considerable. Bruck and Ross's guitar-playing proper was put to a severe test with the performance of the two other pieces, *Eight Traditional Pieces for guitar* by Michael von Biel (b.1937), who confined himself to traditional playing techniques, and *Salut for Caudwell* by Helmut Lachenmann (b.1935), who went out of his way to explore all the sounds that can, if one tries hard, be drawn from a guitar: an exercise of instrumental alienation which sounded rather 'passé', although it was written as recently as 1977. If nothing else, it demonstrated the great versatility of the two artists who drew the weirdest effects from their instruments and were much applauded by a minimal audience of cognoscenti.

Wednesday November 7

John Buller's *Proença*, the outstanding BBC commission of the 1977 Proms, was repeated in the RFH with the same artists: Sarah Walker (mezzo-soprano), Timothy Walker (electric guitar) and the BBC SO under Mark Elder. Again the audience was kept spellbound for nearly 40 minutes by the significant relevance of the subject, the appeal of the music and the excellence of the performance.

Proença is a setting of 16 Provençal troubador lyrics from the 12th and 13th centuries, and the work is all about song in its social, poetic and musical implications. Through the songs — which may be either verbal, when the structure is determined by the meter, vocal, when pure melisma predominates, or instrumental, when the guitar intervenes to express what can no longer be sung — we witness the history of the troubadour civilisation from the unprecedented flowering of troubadour poetry to the savage destruction of Provençal culture 150 years later, in the course of the Albigensian Crusade.

As his basic material Buller uses three troubadour melodies, which are transformed into interval groups and rhythmic cells. The work falls into eleven sections, progressing from the spring-like desire to sing new songs, to sexual love, small feudal wars, to the mounting social unrest and the final collapse and the massacre of St. Ségur, where 240 men and women were burnt to death. While the voice, singing in the original Provençal, alternates between verbal chanting and free melisma, and the orchestra proceeds from the polyphonic playing of small groups to the build-up of a colossal agglomeration of textures, the guitar adds a new song and a new voice, that of coming protest and revolt.

Song has always been a powerful political weapon, and Buller draws an eloquent parallel between the extermination of a courtly, yet liberal civilisation by the northern Franks and the church and the brutalising of a pop group during the Chicago Convention of 1968, as described by Norman Mailer in his book *The Siege of Chicago*. Just as the guitar becomes a symbol of rock 'n' roll, the poem of the troubadour Arnaud Daniel stands for protest, and when the voice is silenced by terror and the guitar is left to carry on single-handed, everything is suddenly eradicated from memory: the ever-increasing weight of layer upon layer of independent patterns and ostinati, under which the structure eventually collapses; the ever-growing urgency of the wind instruments going over eventually to multiphonic chords in an effort to intensify their playing; the 78-note chord on the strings, repeated three times in order to symbolise the massacre. Even the more intimate moments recede into oblivion, and after the orchestra has reached a point of no return and the voices have whispered their last 'amor', quickly absorbed by a clarinet, all that remains is the image of Sarah Walker reciting and vocalising from memory, of her tenderness and her passion and of the strangely untypical and greatly appealing guitar playing of Timothy Walker. But once the terrific impact of the work has worn off, memory will return and gradually deepen as time passes.

Thursday November 22

The occasion of another of those only too frequent and unfortunate clashes. In the Purcell Room the excellent young Medici Quartet played works by Britten, Bennett, Muldowney and Simon Bainbridge, but as the pieces by Bainbridge and Muldowney were early works, I opted for the first performance of Douglas Young's *Vers d'un voyage vers l'hiver* at one of the BBC College Concerts.

Commissioned by the BBC and broadcast on 'Music in our Time' prior to the performance in Logan Hall, *Vers d'un voyage vers l'hiver* is a setting of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire scored for twelve voices. It is a work of many facets and many vocal techniques that catches the ambiguity of Apollinaire's words as well as the spirit of his surrealist poems — passing without transition from dreamy musing to outright violence, tossing pitches and words with surrealistic unpredictability, superimposing sweet melodies and angry verbal outbursts, whispers and vocalises with soft but persistent drones in between — and lends some sort of stability to the shifting images of the hallucination-inducing train journey. Past, present and future are telescoped into a moment of drama that leads to, but is not resolved, only halted, by the chorus, the work ends on a note of suspense, a kind of question mark that sets on speculating about the other, yet unwritten, madrigals in a sequence which *Vers d'un voyage* is eventually to be the central piece. The BBC Singers gave a fascinating performance under the assured direction of John Poole. The other works in the programme, by John Reeves and Henri Pousseur, were played by the London Sinfonietta.

Thursday November 29

The second concert of the Goethe Institute series was given by Anomaly from the Birmingham Arts Lab. The programme promised well, but in the course of the evening it became more and more difficult to relate to the pieces. Simon Emmerson's *Shakespeare Fragments*, a 15-minute piece for soprano, flute, tuba, piano and live electronics, did not add up to much more than the 'steadily shifting and intersecting melodies' described in the programme note and rang a disturbing number of bells. Dominic Muldowney's *Two from Arcadia* for tuba and cor anglais, a first performance, was strangley alienating on first acquaintance, but repeated hearing will probably bring the work into focus. Not so John Casken's *la Orana, Gauguin* for soprano and piano, which was sung with great expression and much sensitivity by Lynda Richardson, but missed the passion of Ravel's *Chansons madécasses* and the sensuality of Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* and had little to offer beyond atmosphere and illustration. Melvyn Poore's *Tubason* for prepared tuba and four-channel amplification sounded like some sort of updated Globokar without Globokar's humour and theatricality: a brilliant showpiece for Poore's own virtuosity on his instrument, but little else. To end the concert, we heard Richard Orton's *Escalation* for flute, clarinet, tuba and piano. Little could be made out of the programme note, but the piece showed genuine imagination and ingenuity in the use of the instruments, and unless I am very much mistaken it ended with a joke of the Ligeti kind: an instrumental joke, well placed and much enjoyed.

Sunday, December 2

What the American trombonist James Fulkerson played at his Wigmore Hall recital — works for tenor and bass trombone by Stephen Montague, Giacinto Scelsi, John Rimmer and himself — required a fabulous technique and a great familiarity with electronic devices, which were handled with great authority by Barry Anderson, founder of the West Square Electronic Music Studio. How it happened that the pieces sounded so similar is difficult to explain, but the monotony was such that I did not stay for the second part of the concert, which featured works by Roger Marsh, Jonty Harrison and Globokar.

Monday December 3

The programme of the Redcliffe Concert in the QEH was a model of imaginative planning. It included one rarely

heard work by Maxwell Davies (*Stedman Caters* of 1968) and one practically new work by John Marlow Rhys (*Capriccio* of 1978), both for almost identical instrumental forces and of similar duration; the two works, played with visible pleasure by the excellent Redcliffe Ensemble and conducted with great insight by Lionel Friend, complemented one another in more than one way.

Davies's *Stedman Caters*, divided into nine sections and approximately 15-minutes long, vibrates with many delicate resonances, and although there are some faint reminiscences of the quasi-hysterical sound one remembers from some of his expressionist works such as *Revelation and Fall* (which were very much in evidence at *Stedman Caters*' first performance by the Pierrrot Players), these were very much toned down by Friend, who emphasised instead the sparseness and austerity of the sound. *Stedman Caters*, as well as its earlier companion piece *Stedman Doubles* (1956), is derived from the well-known change-ringing method, on which the serial material of the work is based. This very special brand of serialism should best be defined by the medieval name of 'musique savante': difficult to apprehend but easy to assimilate and to enjoy.

Rhys's *Capriccio* is exactly what the title says: capricious, unpredictable, imaginative and entertaining as well — a fun piece, a toy piece, clockwork cum perpetuum mobile cum machine. What the composer has set himself to investigate is the process of repetition, which is explored on the level of passacaglia, ostinato and systemic procedures, also through various other patterns, each of them linked with one specific section and strictly confined to the internal structure of that section.

Another form-building element is the use, at certain points, of very short sections, which produce a sense of climax through the increased rate of changing patterns; whereas the opposite effect, that of decay and disintegration, is obtained through the fragmentation of patterns and an increasing distance between their occurrences. While the internal structure of each section is obsessed with repetitive processes, repetition of any sort is strictly banned from the overall form, which could be viewed as a set of variations on a compositional process or, as the composer himself puts it, as an essay in systems of repetition.

As one leaves the concert, humming the tune of harp cum toy piano, one tries to recall echoes that rang: not so much of Carter, Xenakis and Kagel, influences acknowledged by Rhys, as of Birtwistle, of certain gestures and intervallic groups from *Punch and Judy* in particular. And just like Birtwistle (... *agm* ...) Rhys, using the image of 'strips of wallpaper in a supermarket', shows a marked interest in the nature of the fragment. There is also the link of the mechanical toy (Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae mechanicae perpetuum*), and though it may be wrong to speak of Birtwistle as an influence, there is an unmistakable affinity between them which it would be hard to overlook.

One also recalls some especially attractive aural events such as the humorous association of piccolo and bass clarinet, a tender sostenuto for vibraphone and harp or the ticking away of clarinet, marimba and strings. With great skill the scholarly exploration was turned into an exuberant piece of music-making.

Wednesday December 5

Four new works from the 1979 SPNM Composers' Weekend were performed in the Purcell Room by the Locrian String Quartet, the Phoenix Wind Quartet, James Shenton (viola) and Helen Tunstall (harp) under Peter Wiegold's lively direction. Standards were set by two modern classics, Lutoslawski's String Quartet (1964) and Birtwistle's *Tragoedia* (1965), and a good level of compositional skill was achieved by all four young composers.

Mercury by Gwyn Pritchard (b.1948) is a piece of many layers, shades, contrasts and transformations, as unpredictable as quicksilver and just as captivating in its elusive manner. *Hommage a Miro* by Roger Redgate (b.1958), a commission of the Phoenix Wind Quintet, consists of three movements: some rather pointillistic 'Constellations', a highly lyrical 'Notturmo' articulated by three solo cadenzas, and 'Imaginary Portraits', full of intriguing little jokes which add up to an entertaining set of

variations. *In the Presence of the Goat* by David Murray (b.1948) is a multi-sectional work, consisting of eight movements and based on Birtwistle's *Tragoedia*, with some good ideas but too little shape to hold the listener's attention for its twelve minutes' duration. Whereas the fourth piece, *Glittering of Spring* by Mark Bellis (b.1953), was a piece of enchanting little touches of colour here and there, and of subtle hues and shades achieved through clever scoring and conveyed through expert playing, from which this first performance benefited considerably.

Thursday December 6

The third BBC College Concert of the season took place at the Royal Academy of Music, where the London Sinfonietta, conducted by Peter Eötvös, played works by one Soviet and two Hungarian composers and presented the first UK performance of *The Sickle*, the first of two song cycles on Russian texts by Nigel Osborne (b.1948). The Radcliffe Award for British music — won in 1977 by the second work, *I am Goya* for baritone and four instruments, on a poem by Andrei Znesensky — led to the belated 'discovery' of Osborne in England six years after he had been discovered on the Continent and long after many of his works had been performed at most of the international festivals. *The Sickle*, on poems by Esenin ('The Golden Grove') and Mayakovsky ('Our March'), scored for soprano, amplified acoustic guitar and chamber orchestra, was premiered at The Hague in December 1977, repeated at the Warsaw Autumn of 1978 and finally brought to London through the combined efforts of the BBC and the London Sinfonietta.

Vibrating with deep emotion, the work is a kind of 'scena' in two acts: the first a landscape vision of wide expanses and latent energy, throbbing to the plucked sounds of guitar, harp and strings; the second a dramatic conflict bursting on the listener with unexpected violence and thrust forward with an urgency that is generated by the words, immediately taken up by the music and cut off with an abruptness that precludes all appeasement and withholds all solution. The text was expertly sung and movingly recited by Jane Manning; the London Sinfonietta was at its very best and special mention should be made of the guitarist Timothy Walker, who played his very demanding part seemingly without effort.

Sonnets of Petrarch by Elena Firsova (b.1950), written in the typical idiom of the 30s, and *Sorozat*, a set of five movements for chamber ensemble by Attila Bozay (b.1939), a brilliant performer himself who knows how to obtain spectacular effects from his players, shed an interesting light on present-day music in the Soviet Union and Hungary. The evening ended most appropriately with a performance of Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*.

Sunday December 9

The Lontano concert given at St. John's Smith Square may have passed unnoticed but for the performances prepared with loving care by Odaline de la Martinez. *Terra Rossa* by Creswell is built around fragments of a 'well-known Italian red flag song' and to the composer the earth-red pigment of the title suggests 'music of bright colours and contrasts — dramatic and obvious — angry and uncompromising'. To the listener the gentle musing of flute (Ingrid Culliford), cello (Tanya Prochazka) and piano (Odaline de la Martinez) sounded more like a serenade, soft-coloured and restrained, and so did Barbara Kolb's *Figments* for flute and piano, with fragments surfacing as in a dream and all cohesion avoided. James Wood kept an equally low profile with his 13-minute Japanese fantasy called *Kagen*, scored for piccolo, cello and koto doubling percussion (the latter played by the composer). Surprisingly enough, this is neither 'cheap imitation' nor annexation of alien goods, but the entirely authentic and original creation of a new sound world, without any model but his own imagination and with no other links than a very obvious affinity with the Far East. The form is that of refrain and verse and the sound is that of magic. Time stood still and it took the audience quite some while to break out of the spell.

Wednesday January 2, 1980

Exceptionally enough, this year's first contemporary music event, though given by two young musicians playing 20th century music, was not part of the Park Lane Group's 'Young Artists and 20th Century Music' series, which we have come to regard as a kind of official opening of the new year. Marianne Ehrhardt (flute) and Susan Drake (harp) played works by Stephen Dodgson, Jacques Ibert, Arnold Bax, Jesus Guridi, André Caplet and William Alwyn in the Purcell Room, most of them quite pretty, with decorative flourishes and gliding arpeggios, pleasing to the ear and relaxing to the mind. In this context, Michael Finnissy's *Kagami-Jishi* for flute and harp, specially commissioned for this recital, was all the more arresting: a highly ritualistic piece with strangely disturbing resonances and ghostly reverberations that suggest the 'mirror reflection' aspect of the title rather than the 'ecstatic dance' of the girl. What we heard was a dedicated and, from what one can tell, faithful performance of an unspectacular but at the same time very demanding piece. Marianne Ehrhardt also played Berio's *Sequenza I* for flute with great skill and assurance.

Monday January 7 to Friday January 11: 'PLG Young Artists and 20th Century Music' series

In the course of five evenings in the Purcell Room, no fewer than 33 works by contemporary composers were presented, eight of them written for and mostly commissioned by the 'young artists' of the series. Benjamin Britten and Gordon Crosse were represented in each programme and every single evening provided some rewarding experience.

Folksong was obviously the theme of the first concert, when One Plus One, the excellent violin and viola duo of Alexander Balanescu and Elisabeth Perry, gave the first performance of Douglas Young's highly stylised and greatly entertaining arrangement of traditional Irish music, marked by a lively virtuoso dialogue and called *Slieve League* after a famous place on the West coast of Donegal. They also played Christian Wolff's energetic and humorous variations on the American Civil War song *Rock About*. David Owen Norris was the excellent piano accompanist to Susan Tyrrell (contralto) in Britten's rather pale and untypical *French Folksongs*.

A new work by Simon Bainbridge (b.1952) for oboe and piano, commissioned simultaneously by Nora Post for a concert at the University of San Diego and by Melinda Maxwell, the PLG 'young artist' of the evening, and therefore called *For Mel and Nora*, was the highlight of the second concert. It is a piece of tremendous wit and charm, playful and inventive, tailor-made for the vivacious and engaging Melinda Maxwell (who also gave a brilliant performance of Berio's *Sequenza VII*) and for Julian Dawson-Lyell, a remarkable piano accompanist.

Mark Hamlyn was the solo trombonist of the third evening. After Berio's *Sequenza V*, he played *Sound the tucket sonance and the note to mount* for trombone and two-channel tape by Barry Anderson (b.1935), one of the numerous commissions of the series but not an entirely successful work. Like Boulez in *Eclats/Multiples*, Anderson sets out, with less expertise and to slighter effect, to 'explore and relate two classes of sound and of sound events: short attacks and sustained tones'. For Hamlyn it was a challenge met bravely and with confidence.

Unfortunately I missed the fourth evening, with David Owen Norris's performance of Messiaen's *Quatre études de rythme*, which was described by the *Financial Times* as 'clearly exceptionally well understood and absorbed', and a new work by Crosse, *A Year and a Day* for solo clarinet. So we come to the last evening, which was one of the most enjoyable, when the very young and very expert Myrha Saxophone Quartet played Dominic Muldowney's enchanting *Five melodies for four saxophones doubling seven more*. From the very start, when the soprano saxophone sets in very softly with a high F, one falls under the spell of these 'melodies' doodling along systemically. Muldowney uses minimal material to maximum effect, small patterns that permutate, revolve around themselves and undergo changes of accent, articulation and mood from those of a pastoral idyll to those of boisterous outdoor games. Commissioned by the quartet and designed to show the versatility of the ensemble and their theatrical abilities, the five little pieces also make considerable demands on the

inventiveness of the players, and the performance would have greatly benefited from an acoustically more suitable and more spacious hall.

Thursday January 10

The London Sinfonietta gave this season's fourth BBC College Concert at the Royal Academy of Music. The programme was of particular interest and it was therefore all the more regrettable that it coincided with the fourth evening of the PLG Young Artists series. The first part consisted of Stravinsky's *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* and the first UK performance of *Ophelia Dances* by Oliver Knussen (b.1952), which was first introduced by Michael Tilson Thomas and the Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Centre in New York five years ago. Scored for an ensemble of nine instruments, the piece has that very peculiar fluidity we have come to associate with Knussen's music — a sort of 'French connection' — where everything shimmers and shines, gliding freely from one image to the next. A touch of magic rather than tragedy is a feature of this seven-minute piece, which ends in an atmosphere of relaxation and regret.

Ronald Zollmann, the young Belgian conductor, also directed Boulez' *Domaines*, a musical mobile that demands instantaneous decision-making by solo clarinettist and conductor in turn. The soloist Anthony Pay moved from one group to the next, engaging the players in highly virtuosic arguments, but one kept wondering how much of it was genuinely spontaneous and how much had been planned in advance.

Saturday January 12

Capricorn gave the first performance of another new work of Finnissey's, the *Folk-song Set*, in its 1979 version. Dating back to 1969, the set of four songs has since acquired a flexibility of vocal line particularly suited to Josephine Nendick's voice and a transparency of texture for which Capricorn found exactly the right brand of softness and delicacy. Christopher O'Neal (oboe) gave a beautifully articulated and intensely lyrical account of Edison Denisov's *Romantic Music* for oboe, harp and string trio, also written in the late 60s, and Josephine Nendick sang Sandor Balassa's *Hajak* ('Tresses'), a setting of two poems by Charles Vildrac, with the right mixture of genuine feeling and deliberate simplicity. The concert also included performances of Carter's Duo for violin and piano and Barry Guy's *Play*, an instrumental re-interpretation of Beckett's *Cascando*. The latter was conducted with great intelligence by Lionel Friend, musical director of Capricorn.

Thursday January 17

A concert by Suoraan at St. John's Smith Square will be remembered partly for the outlandish names of works such as *Evyali* and *Psappha* (Xenakis), *Tälawa* and *Sikagnuka* (Finnissy) and *Aäneen* (James Clarke), which make it almost impossible to recall the pieces by their title, and partly for some extraordinary achievements on the part of the performers, whose skills were put to a fearsome test.

Finnissy's *Tälawa*, a Suoraan commission scored for mezzo-soprano, flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, piano and percussion, received its first performance. Like the earlier *Sikagnuka* for flute solo, it was inspired by Hopi Indian mythology, and both pieces had the soloists each playing a variety of instruments, sometimes simultaneously, singing as well as playing the flute and rushing over the piano keys in all directions so as to cover the entire keyboard non-stop. Josephine Nendick threaded her way through all this commotion with a smooth, very even and almost inaudible voice, and most of the time one was much too absorbed in the efforts of the players to concentrate on the music itself. One wonders whether the same or even a better effect could perhaps have been obtained by graphic notation, which would have given the hard-driven performers, Nancy Ruffer (flute), Christopher Redgate (oboe) and Finnissy himself (piano) more time to think instead of being entirely preoccupied with the accuracy of pitches and with rhythmic precision.

When writing the two pieces, Finnissy must have had in mind works by Xenakis and Brian Ferneyhough, both models of extreme complexity, and his interpretation of *Evyali* was almost too fluent, with more than the average of

right notes and no display of struggle, panic or exhaustion. The other work by Xenakis, *Psappha* for percussion solo, was given a slightly diluted and shapeless performance by Anthony Wagstaff, and the over-demanding programme was rounded off with works by the group's musical directors, Clarke and Richard Emsley.

Monday January 21

The BBC Symphony Orchestra gave a long overdue performance of Maxwell Davies's *Second Taverner Fantasia* under the direction of John Pritchard, who had conducted the first performance of the work with the LPO 15 years earlier. At the present performance one missed the peculiar sharpness of Davies's instrumentation and some of the shock caused by his extreme processes of distortion and parody as opposed to formal development. Even on a formal level the work sounded more conventional than one remembered it, nearer the mainstream of symphonic tradition. Having since heard many other works, especially the Symphony, one might have listened with hindsight and discovered in the *Fantasia* signs of the new direction Davies's language was to take eventually and which had escaped us then, but the BBC SO seemed less familiar with Davies's language now than was the LPO in 1965. Unless such works become part of every leading orchestra's repertoire, neither the listeners nor the musicians will ever be able to catch up with the development of contemporary music.

Tuesday January 29

About a week after the *Taverner Fantasia*, Pritchard conducted another work based on transformation with, perhaps, a certain amount of parody, though not in the medieval sense of the word: Kagel's *Variations without Fugue for large orchestra on the Variations and Fugue on a theme by Handel for piano, Op. 24, by Johannes Brahms (1861-62)*. Having commissioned Kagel once before to write a work for the celebrations of the Beethoven year in Bonn in 1970 and left to face the scandal caused by his *Ludwig van*, the German authorities showed quite some determination and faith in commissioning him again, only three years later, this time for Hamburg to celebrate the 140th anniversary of Brahms. Although the work must have alienated some, no so-called 'sacrilege' was involved this time and the work was well received. In a fictitious 'letter to Brahms' Kagel explained he would make some 'insignificant alterations' to Brahms's work, but that he did not 'intend to touch the rhythmic structure', only 'to alter the sequence of the variations and the harmony'. Rather than a distortion, as in the case of Davies, this is a re-interpretation of Brahms's set of variations on a Handel harpsichord piece, a speculation on how Brahms would have written his variations today and on how he would have reacted if he had been given Kagel's commission. The outcome is a virtuoso orchestral essay of historic, aesthetic and stylistic dimensions. In true Kagel fashion, there is also a joke of sorts when everything is heading towards a climax: the entry of the fugue. This never materialises as the work is explicitly a set of 'Variations without Fugue'. To this fictitious and deliberate frustration was added, on this occasion, the real one of being deprived of Handel's original on which the whole work is based, and which Kagel asks to be played on the harpsichord as a concluding gesture, on account of a failure in amplification. Notwithstanding this technical breakdown, the work was extremely well received and the LPO, who also gave a splendid performance of another arrangement of Brahms, Schoenberg's orchestration of the Piano Quartet in G minor, shared the success with Pritchard, their perceptive and intelligent conductor.

Sunday February 24

In the fifth BBC College Concert of the season, which took place at the Royal College of Music, Michael Gielen conducted the BBC SO and the BBC Singers, and the two Kontarsky brothers played the *Dialogues* for two pianos and large orchestra by Bernd-Alois Zimmermann. *Dialogues* is an offspring of Zimmermann's opera *Die Soldaten*. Its material is largely based on the opera's interludes, and the work was written immediately after the opera in an attempt to show that the music was at least eminently performable,

even if the opera, decreed 'unstageable', presented certain problems and required revisions before it was put on in Cologne in 1965. *Dialogues* was played by its dedicatees, Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky, with devilish dash and daring. For a work of such strict serial organisation, the music is surprisingly accessible, full of invention, variety and expressive power, and full also of quotations from all styles and periods, which are compressed into a timeless simultaneity of past, present and future in what Zimmermann used to call the 'sphericity of time' (the co-existence of Debussy's *Jeux*, Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K.467, and the Gregorian 'Veni Creator' in one single movement) and which inaugurates a new compositional process. Unfortunately the concert hall of the RCM was entirely inadequate for this pluralistic music, which requires an unusually large platform so that the musicians can be seated far from each other. The stage was cluttered, the audience was crammed together and the two soloists were hidden behind the orchestra, but this did not prevent the listeners from reacting with spontaneous and demonstrative applause.

Dialogues was preceded by Zimmermann's *Stille und Umkehr* ('Stillness and Return'), a 10-minute orchestral essay of Weberian transparency and tenderness, which had been commissioned for the Dürerjahr and was posthumously performed in Nuremberg in 1971. The whole work, scored for an ensemble of 42, mainly brass and percussion, revolves around a drone surrounded by eerie, almost inaudible figuration and accompanied by a haunting, endlessly repeated blues rhythm. One can see how Zimmermann, who finished the work a few days before his suicide in 1970, gradually loosens his grip on pulse, time and sound until the ultimate withdrawal, marked in the score by a laconic 'morendo'. A special note requires the conductor to play the work throughout in the same tempo, with great calm and the strictest observance of the dynamic markings, which vary between 'piano', 'pianissimo' and 'as soft as possible'. Gielen fulfilled all the conditions and conducted a very beautiful and moving performance. The memorable concert ended on a note of reverence and fervour with a performance of Gesualdo's *Tre Sacrae Cantiones* and Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*. The soloists were Ameral Gunson (contralto) and Michael George (bass).

Thursday February 28

Herbert Henck's piano recital at the Goethe Institute was the third event of their 'Contemporary Music Series' this season, designed to encourage the exchange of contemporary music between Britain and West Germany. Henck (b.1948) belongs to that generation of fabulous young pianists who have extended instrumental techniques far beyond past limits, keeping pace with the demands of composers like Stockhausen, Xenakis, Ferneyhough and Finnis. Having reached that degree of proficiency, Henck has shifted his preoccupations from a purely technical to an analytical level, and in order to 'create better understanding of contemporary music' he brings into his performances a degree of clarity that makes the most hermetic music accessible and easy to follow. Everything he touches becomes immediately of riveting interest. Even his introduction, though spoken in halting English, had the audience attentive to his every word, but all the same some printed programme notes would have been appreciated.

Klavierstücke 5 and *6* by Wolfgang Rihm are a mixture of modern gestures and traditional thought closer to Brahms than to Chopin; the one, called *Tombeau*, dark and taciturn; the other, *Bagatelles*, in a lighter mood. This was followed by Gehlhaar's five-minute *Klavierstück 1-1*, subtitled 'Intersection', an essay in density, with textures being in turn loosened and compressed and with varying degrees of cloudiness, for which Henck found a whole range of different shades and nuances. The second part of the recital started with one movement from Walter Zimmermann's *Lokale Musik*, the title referring to Frankonia, his homeland, and to his ecological message, which is expressed in the preparation of the piano with home-grown Frankonian earth and stone. The preparation had to be simplified for practical reasons, but the little piece, a collection of Frankonian folkdance rhythms and melodic patterns as typical of the German brand of systemic music as the original work's total length — seven to eight hours — was light in substance despite the seriousness of its

message. It provided a well placed moment of relaxation before the onslaught of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X*, played with an insight that opened new vistas and showed this well-known and often heard piece from a new perspective. The variety of glissandi, from featherweight brush strokes to violent cascades, of clusters, from the loosest aggregation to the closest density, and of resonances reverberating in all directions before passing, imperceptibly, into an eloquent silence, together with the sheer power and authority of the playing, left the audience dumbfounded, and one can only hope to hear this amazing artist again in the near future. A close study of his book on Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* is warmly recommended to all students of modern piano music.

Sunday March 2

In the third recital of their 'Contemporary Voices' series, New Macnaghten Concerts presented the Five Centuries Ensemble of four young American artists full of initiative and adventurousness: Carol Plantamura (soprano), John Patrick Thomas (counter-tenor), Martha McGaughey (viola da gamba) and Arthur Haas (keyboard instruments). The full title of their concert, 'Music of two cities', aroused great anticipation, and the ICA was overflowing with eager listeners attracted less by the new music of New York than by the madrigals of Ferrara, which never fail to enchant audiences, even when sung slightly out of tune and with less skill than some of the British Renaissance-music ensembles. The six works from New York were mainly typical examples of minimal art that amounted altogether to less than 30 minutes of music. Cage's *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* for voice and closed piano was sung with unwanted expression, and his *A Valentine out of Season* for prepared piano, also from the 40s, had about it an air of nostalgia. Feldman's *Voices and Viol*, specially written for the performers, was predictably dreamy and only the *Three Airs for Frank O'Hara's Angel*, Lukas Foss's contribution to the Five Centuries Ensemble's repertoire, brought out their very real theatrical potential. Carol Plantamura seemed rather miscast in Berio's *Sequenza III*, and one had to wait for the encore, a most hilarious account of a hit song from the early 20s, *I'm in Heaven*, to become aware of the group's sense of humour, their flair and charm, and to enjoy a moment of genuine exhilaration and excitement.

Tuesday March 4

The last of this year's BBC College Concerts, given at the Royal College of Music by the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra under Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, featured a work by an unknown Russian composer, Alexander Knaife (b.1942), which aroused some curiosity. However, *The Canterville Ghost* for soloists and chamber orchestra, after the tale by Oscar Wilde, is a sadly predictable piece of neo-romantic music, reminiscent of Shostakovich and Prokofiev but without their vigour and wit. A performance of Stravinsky's rarely heard *Threni* for soloists, chorus and orchestra, written in an hieratic style and a strictly serial idiom, concluded the concert, which suffered again from a lack of space and, as a result, a lack of balance and clarity.

Wednesday March 5

The first performance of George Benjamin's first major orchestral piece, *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, by the Cambridge University Musical Society's orchestra confirmed all one's hopes and expectations. At the age of 20, Benjamin is in full command of compositional techniques. He has acquired a formidable amount of skill and knowledge from his teacher Messiaen and, little by little, under the guidance of Alexander Goehr, he is extending his field of activity. Inspired by a passage from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the work is a kind of symphonic poem which describes Eliot's 'hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains. . . / Ringed by the flat horizon only', a magnificent fresco of great eloquence and atmosphere, using all the new technical devices but traditional in its formal outline. The orchestration is colourful, the images are precise, nothing is left to chance and surprises are only too rare. Having attained such an astonishing degree of mastery, Benjamin should now break out of the boundaries of academic training, try his luck on new paths, venture into

unknown territory and be ready to take some risks, meet some challenges and overcome real or self-made obstacles, whatever the consequences may be.

Wednesday March 12 and Thursday March 13

The Electro-Acoustic Music Studio at the City University, London, presented some recent works by its composer and performer members in three public events called 'Electro-Acoustics in Concert'. The planning was carried out with utmost care and technical hitches and breakdowns were successfully avoided. The programmes consisted of pure tape pieces (by Jonty Harrison and Alejandro Vinao), pieces for singers and electronics (Simon Emmerson), instruments and tape (Steve Ingham), amplified instruments (John Adams) and amplified voices (Alan Belk, Berio, Kevin Jones and Roger Marsh). The university's resident vocal group Vocem provided delightfully lively performances of Berio's *A-Ronne* for eight amplified voices, Belk's *Where the murmurs die* and Emmerson's enchanting *Ophelia's Dream*, and Belk gave a thrilling account of Roger Marsh's *Dum*. The mini-festival attracted a great many listeners eager to familiarise themselves with electro-acoustic music and many prejudices were overcome in the course of these two days.

Thursday March 27

The fourth concert of the Goethe Institute's 'Contemporary Music Series' 'Solo/Duo'. What Richard Bernas (piano) and Roger Heaton (clarinets) had to offer was not so much a concert, more a way of life: a demonstration of total commitment and a display of new performance techniques and theatrical skills. For many it was an initiation, for some a test of endurance and tolerance.

The even flow of Cage's piano music with its long-drawn silences and mysterious resonances, the slightly dated, yet highly entertaining gimmicks of Globokar's *Vox instrumentalisée*, the theatrical aspect of Christopher Fox's *Divisions* for clarinet solo, Kagel's oddly nostalgic *Unguis incarnatus est* for piano and bass instrument (in this case a bass clarinet) and, between the different items, short passages from Kagel's 'Metapiece' (*Mimetics*) for piano,

were played by Bernas and Heaton in exactly the right spirit and with the appropriate distribution of futile (or not so futile) gestures. Richard Orton's *Pièce de résistance*, nine solid minutes of tonal, systemic doodling on the piano, may have outstayed its welcome, but such pieces have to be long in order to produce the right effect, and a last little moment of *Mimetics* put a definite and appropriate end to it.

Sunday March 30

A recital by Heinz Holliger and Vinko Globokar at the Riverside Studios was beset with misfortunes and technical breakdowns. The time when one took this sort of occurrence in one's stride belongs to the past, and rather than give the wrong impression of a concert marked by extraordinary technical exploits on the part of two outstanding artists, I prefer not to go into details and reserve my judgement.

Monday March 31

Fortunately there was another chance to hear Holliger no later than the following evening, at a London Music Digest concert entirely devoted to Berio's first eight *Sequenze*, written between 1958 and 1976. Six of the eight soloists on this occasion were the original dedicatees, and hearing the eight *Sequenze* in sequence, it was particularly gratifying to realise that they have lost none of their novelty and direct appeal. Unlike the latest experimental extensions of performing techniques, probing into the mechanical potential of instruments and disregarding the musical result, Berio's extensions were the direct outcome of the avantgarde composers' ever-growing demands and have since become part of every self-respecting performer's equipment. Certain images, that of the pastoral flute and the arpeggiando harp, have been blotted out, a new, polyphonic dimension has been added to the playing of wind instruments; the ever-present challenge has turned into a powerful incentive. The diversity of the pieces is remarkable, their inventiveness staggering and their scope virtually unlimited. The addition of *Sequenze IX* for percussion (1980) would have added another 15 to these 68 minutes of sheer delight and deepest gratification.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Dear Sirs,

My exceeding delight at *Contact's* reappearance, and joy at yet again providing a pretext for Richard Toop to air his invaluable knowledge of Stockhauseniana, considerably outweigh any sense of grievance his asperities ('On writing about Stockhausen', *Contact* 20, pp. 25-27) may have intended to arouse. If you want to fish in winter you have to be ready to endure the cold, but to do any fishing at all, for minnows or snags, someone has to break the ice.

My book was written in order that a significant composer might be recognised and discussed without prejudice during his lifetime, in a way Bartók, Webern, Schoenberg and Varèse were denied during theirs. That the strategy has appeared to succeed is witnessed by the bleeding chunks of text which appear unacknowledged in record reviews and elsewhere; that Stockhausen is now good copy for the music press is evidenced at least in part by the subsequent publishing career of Mr Toop himself. I bow to his more intimate acquaintance with the Stockhausen archives, acknowledge his helpful assistance in my own clumsy endeavours, rejoice at each successive appearance of a new chapter from his own definitive study (whether in *Contact*, *Perspectives*, *Musical Quarterly* or *The Music Review*) and deplore the circumstances which have conspired to prevent publication of these, and his translations of Boulez and Stockhausen, earlier and in book form. Had this material been published in 1972 my book might never have been written. But it was not available then, nor is it all now. My justification for devoting four years to the task for which I am now chivvied is summed up by Schoenberg's remark: 'Someone had to do the job, and no-one else was willing, so it fell to me.' And the need to break the ice demanded a blunt instrument (if one can still say as much without suggesting abject betrayal) — not a surgeon's scalpel.

But the two years or so during which my book has, in Mr Toop's own words, 'established itself as the biggest and best available study of Stockhausen's work' have also afforded its author ample opportunity to assess Mr Toop's own piecemeal contribution to the Stockhausen literature in its wake. For for all his detailed knowledge of the composer's affairs in the early 1950s, it has become clear that Mr Toop's interpretation of the composer's personality has its peculiar side.

In an otherwise generous review of my book in the *TLS* (December 3, 1976), he describes it incorrectly as a biography, then goes on to attack at some length my clearly stated decision not to write a biography. There were a number of reasons. In the first place, I could not have written a biography: I did not have access to the necessary information, nor do I have the skill or inclination in that direction. Furthermore, during the time the book was being written I was living in conditions not unadjacent to poverty; it was only through the Arts Council providing a grant that I was able to make the one fact-finding expedition to Cologne and Kürten that I could afford.

In the second place, there is no room in an already bulky and over-priced book for empty speculation of *that* kind. More to the point, I don't believe that the physical circumstances of a composer's career explain his music in the manner Richard Toop appears to imagine. It does not matter to me that Beethoven was careless of personal hygiene, or Stravinsky an hypochondriac. Their music inhabits a separate world, a fact which I agree may be difficult for a non-composer to grasp, but a fact nonetheless. Let me add that my book is a composer's tribute to another composer, not a scholar's — nor, Mr Toop notwithstanding, that of a rabid Gallic or starry-eyed Messiaen acolyte (I did after all *study* with Stockhausen after studying with Messiaen, a full eight years before the book was conceived).

Not that I object to the idea of biography, only wishing that Mr Toop would get on with it instead of blaming me for not doing what he is so evidently more capable of achieving. Instead, Mr Toop's harping on this particular theme has become distinctly monotone. 'What is it that makes Stockhausen tick?' he asks rhetorically. 'In a phrase, fanatical dedication to the belief of the moment.' The key to this composer is, would you believe, religious fanaticism: Catholicism in youth, Aurobindo in middle age.

So what? I fail myself to see any objection to strong belief in an artist, however it might be manifested. Faith in oneself

is necessary, especially for a specialist in new forms of thought, and the strongest form of belief in oneself is dedication to a suprapersonal goal. To call it 'fanaticism' is misleading as well as shamefully pejorative. A fanatic is someone who sacrifices other people to achieve his own ambition, not himself to an ideal. I have recently been taken with the discovery that the detailed mathematics of form and pitch organisation in Stockhausen's early scores, which Mr Toop attributes to the composer's 'fanatical quest for divine perfection', bear comparison with the intricate proportional relationships of English ecclesiastical music from Dunstable to Frye and Taverner, arising from precisely similar motives. Is the 'quest' and its expression in tonal proportion to be admired in the one and abhorred in the other? But of course it is now fashionable to regard Schoenberg as obsessively concerned with his Jewishness, and Webern as a hopeless neurotic.

Mr Toop also plays a familiar tune in his remarks on what I do or do not say about *Refrain*, saying much the same thing in his *TLS* review of 1976. If it indeed represents a 'perilous trap' or 'dangerous metaphysics' to describe *Refrain* as a parable of mortality, then I am entirely unrepentant. Traps for the unwary are no bad thing: even he must admit that they enable the unwary to be sorted out from the wary. A student who is unable to understand such a simple description, having heard the music, is going to have difficulty with a lot more than just Stockhausen. (But students also reflect their teachers, too: how, I wonder, if Mr Toop doesn't understand my meaning, does he expect his students to follow it?) And why 'dangerous'?

In addition, I must protest at the implication that I say no more about *Refrain*. On the contrary, I describe the work as pointillist, jazz-orientated, an exercise in timbre-composition related to *Electronic Study I*, influenced by his study of phonetics, comparable in certain ways with Boulez' *Une dentelle s'abolit*, and much more. If Mr Toop has more of importance to add, let him do so: why doesn't he?

He also complains that I don't get round to describing basic formal procedures in *Kreuzspiel*. Since I relied on Mr Toop for what structural information *is* there, dare I say he has only himself to blame? But in reality my book is not intended for his sort of reader (who can find the aforementioned information in Jonathan Harvey in any case). What I do point out (on page 26) is the work's 'cross-play' from piano (non-sustaining) to winds (sustaining) and from pitched to non-pitched instruments as well as from high to low. Mr Toop ignores all this, however, choosing to remember only a passing reference to the woodwinds' 'air of melancholy', an observation which may not strike him as terribly useful (though he has apparently found it hard to forget) but which might suggest to a less specialist amateur a link between this aspect of the piece and the voices in *Gesang der Jünglinge*.

The mildness of Mr Toop's criticisms doesn't render their occasional querulous perversity any more attractive. Until he can come up with a more coherent thesis than hitherto — and may this be soon — I am content to remain,

Yours unrepentantly,
Robin Maconie

SCORES, BOOKS AND MAGAZINES RECEIVED

David N. Baker

Improvisational Patterns: The Bebop Era Vol. 1 (Roberton)
Modern Jazz Duets Vols. 1 and 2 (Roberton)

Rory Boyle

Toccata for Organ (Chester Music)

Charles Camilleri

Americana: Sonata No. 2 for piano (Roberton)
Concerto Americano for piano (Roberton)
Fantasia concertante No. 5 for solo guitar (Roberton)
Images for three clarinets (Roberton)
Percussion Solos/Duos/Trios (Roberton)
Prelude and Dance for three percussionists (Roberton)
Sama'i for flute solo (Roberton)

David Chesky
Advanced Jazz/Rock Rhythms (Roberton)

Allan Colin
Contemporary Etudes (Roberton)

Jean Coulthard, David Duke, Joan Hansen
Music of our Time Books 1-5 for piano (Roberton)
Music of our Time — Teacher's Manuals 1 and 2 (Roberton)

Peter Maxwell Davies
Runes from a Holy Island (Chester Music)
Three Organ Voluntaries (Chester Music)

Lorenzo Ferrero
Marilyn: Scene degli anni '50 in due atti — partitura and libretto
(Ricordi)

Carlos Alberto Pinto Fonseca
Missa Afro-Brasileira (Roberton)

Jonathan Harvey
Inner Light (2) (Faber Music)

Lejaren Hiller
Persiflage for flute, oboe and percussion (Roberton)

Rudy Houston
Avant Garde Duets (Roberton)

Michael Jacques
Midsummer Suite for recorder or flute and piano (Roberton)

Leoš Jánáček
Otcenas (Our Father) — edited and adapted by Antonin Tucapsky
(Roberton)

Lothar Klein
Eclogues for Guitar Solo (Roberton)

Oliver Knussen
Autumnal for violin and piano (Faber Music)
Rosary Songs (Faber Music)
Trumpets for soprano and three clarinets (Faber Music)

Kenneth Leighton
Sequence for All Saints (Roberton)

Edward McGuire
Legend for viola and electronic sounds (Scotus Music)

Raymond Premru
Quartet for two trumpets, horn and trombone (Chester Music)

Neil Saunders
Fantasia for brass quartet (Roberton)

Bernard Stevens
Ballad No. 2 for piano solo (Roberton)
Improvisation for solo viola (Roberton)

John Tavener
Thérèse — vocal score and libretto (Chester Music)

Antonin Tucapsky
Lauds for unaccompanied choir (Roberton)

Hugh Wood
String Quartet No. 3 (Chester Music)

Gerald Abraham
The Concise Oxford History of Music (Oxford University Press)

John Cage
Empty Words: Writings '73-'78 (Marion Boyars)

Norman Del Mar
Mahler's Sixth Symphony — A Study (Eulenberg Books)

Michael Hurd
The Oxford Junior Companion to Music (based on the original
publication by Percy Scholes) (Oxford University Press)

Bayan Northcott, ed.
The Music of Alexander Goehr (Schott Music)

Christopher Redwood, ed.
A Delius Companion (John Calder)

Graham Wade
Traditions of the Classical Guitar (John Calder)

Artinfo/Musinfo No. 27 (Département d'Informatique, Université
Paris VIII)

La Biennale di Venezia: Annuario 1978; Eventi del 1977 (La
Biennale di Venezia)

Directory of Australian Music Organisations (Australian Music
Centre Ltd)

Musik-Konzepte: Die Reihe über Komponisten
Nos. 1/2 Claude Debussy; 4 Alban Berg; 6 Edgard Varèse; 7 Leos
Janacek; 9 Alban Berg; 11 Erik Satie; Sonderband: John Cage
(edition text+kritik, Munich)

AMC Newsletter, Vol. 20, No. 1-Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter 1978-Spring
1980) (American Music Center, Inc.)

Composer, Nos. 64-69 (Summer 1978-Spring 1980)

Key Notes 6-11 (1977/2-1980/1)

The Musical Times, Vol. 118, No. 1618-Vol. 121, No. 1651
(December 1977-September 1980)

Parachute 9-19 (Winter 1977-Summer 1980)

Soundings, Nos. 7 & 9 (1978 & 1979-80)

Tempo 123-132 (December 1977-March 1980)

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News from Faber Music

Jonathan Harvey

now Professor of Music at Sussex University, has returned from IRCAM where he completed a tape piece, *Mortuos plango, vivos voco*, for performance in the Lille Festival on 30 November and in a BBC College Concert at the Guildhall School of Music on 3 December. His *Concelebration*, written earlier this year, has already been performed by Gemini and by the London Sinfonietta and will be given by the Fires of London in the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 5 May 1981. He is currently completing a church opera, *Passion and Resurrection*, for performance in Winchester Cathedral on 22 March and a commission for next year's Three Choirs Festival in Worcester.

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George Benjamin's

Ringed by the Flat Horizon was acclaimed in glowing terms after its August Prom performance — 'a minor miracle of pacing and timing' was the *Financial Times's* description, whilst *The Observer* felt that it 'has a mastery that many labour half a lifetime to acquire'. Benjamin's new *Duo* for cello and piano will be performed in St John's, Smith Square, on 12 November by Ross Pople and the composer, after being given its Carnegie Hall première, and *Flight* for solo flute will be premièred by Kate Lukas in the Wigmore Hall Macnaghten Concert on 9 January.

FLIGHT for solo flute £2.00

PIANO SONATA £5.00

Oliver Knussen

is currently completing *Where the Wild Things Are*, a fantasy in two acts to a libretto by Maurice Sendak, commissioned by the Opera National, Brussels, for the 1980-81 season. *Rumpus-paraphrase*, for piano 4-hands, is based on material from the opera, and will be performed on 5 December by Keith Williams and Penny Rowland in the Purcell Room.

The London Sinfonietta is touring the first part of *Coursing* for chamber orchestra in Hungary and Yugoslavia in October 1980, and the complete work receives its first performance in the QEH on 17 December conducted by Simon Rattle. This will be followed by a Contemporary Music Network tour in the spring. Both the Nash Ensemble and the London Sinfonietta are including *Cantata* for oboe and string trio in their

repertoire this season, and next year the *Third Symphony* (a notable success at last year's Proms) will receive several performances in the United States, under Gunther Schuller, André Previn and its dedicatee, Michael Tilson Thomas.

AUTUMNAL for violin and piano £3.50

SONYA'S LULLABY for piano solo £2.00

ROSARY SONGS for soprano, clarinet, viola and piano £3.50

TRUMPETS for soprano and three clarinets £2.50

Colin Matthews'

String Quartet was given its première in this year's Aldeburgh Festival by the Fitzwilliam Quartet — 'a superb, ambitious new quartet, numerically his first but so confident one finds it hard to believe that' (*The Guardian*). In the same festival, Peter Pears gave the première of Matthews' *Shadows in the Water*, a setting of Traherne for tenor and piano. Matthews is now completing a major orchestral work, *Fifth Sonata*.

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Roger Smalley

is lecturing in music at the University of Western Australia, Perth. It is here that within the last two years the premières have been given of his stage work *William Derrincourt*, a string quartet and several instrumental works. Forthcoming British performances include his new *Konzerstück* for violin and orchestra at a BBC College Concert in the Royal College of Music on 12 November, with Erich Gruenberg and the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Cleobury. On 5 December his *Echo III* for trumpet and tape delay will be given its European première at a Macnaghten Concert in the Wigmore Hall. Smalley is now working on a symphony.

ECHO III for trumpet and tape delay £3.65

ACCORD for two pianos £7.50

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