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no. 26

John Tilbury **Cornelius Cardew**

Gavin Bryars '**Vexations**' and its Performers

Dave Smith **Music in Albania**

Roger Heaton **Horatiu Radulescu, 'Sound Plasma'**

Susan Bradshaw **Arvo Paart**

Peter Phillips **The Ritual Music of John Tavener**

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Hilary Bracefield **Gaudeamus Music Week 1982**

spring 1983

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John Tilbury

Cornelius Cardew

This article is a revised version of the text of 'Cornelius Cardew—a Memorial Lecture', delivered at the Goldsmiths' College School of Adult and Social Studies, in association with the Music Department of the college, on 26 April 1982.

I first met Cornelius Cardew at the Dartington Summer School in August 1959 when we were both 23 years of age. My recollections of that month are hazy and of no particular significance, but some kind of rapport must have been established because soon after my return to London I received a phone call from Cardew. He had a project in mind, a concert of experimental music for one and two pianos (music by the Americans Cage, Feldman, and Wolff, and by Cardew himself), and asked me if I would like to be the other pianist. In January of the following year the concert took place at the Conway Hall, London. Cardew's performances, in particular of the music of Morton Feldman, constitute to all intents and purposes my first lasting memory of the man as artist. Those floating, sourceless sounds, which he played with an unerring sense of timing and an artistry that was as convincing as it was unconventional, evoked an emotional response quite unlike any other I had experienced in listening to music, and which was intensified by Cardew's profound identification with Feldman's work.

How did Cardew's preoccupation with the American avant garde come about? This is an important question in the light of the subsequent influence of North American culture on Europe, especially in the sixties: Cage, Buckminster Fuller, and the abstract expressionist painters, in particular Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (to whom Cardew dedicated his *Octet 61*). Cardew received his formal musical education at the Royal Academy of Music between 1954 and 1957. At this time the Academy was an extremely conservative institution and it did not look kindly on the music of Schoenberg, let alone Boulez or Stockhausen. So it was inevitable that inquiring, restless young souls like Cardew and his friend Richard Rodney Bennett should have reacted in the way they did, rejecting what they regarded as the narrow-minded and bland conservatism of the English musical establishment. The European avant garde, on the other hand, centred in Darmstadt, paraded some progressive slogans; serialism was associated with the scientific method, progress, and discovery, and some apologists, such as René Leibowitz, even claimed that serialism was the musical equivalent of the classless society. The music that Cardew wrote during his time at the Academy, notably the second and third piano sonatas, certainly owed more to Webern and Boulez than to his professors. And the performance that he and Bennett gave at the Academy of Boulez's *Structures*, besides being a considerable technical and musical feat, was probably tantamount to an act of rebellion in the climate that prevailed there.

Under the circumstances Cardew's decision to continue his studies and, as it turned out, to work with Stockhausen in Cologne was not surprising, though the consequences were not without a certain irony. The conditions he found in Germany in 1957 were as

oppressive as anything he had left behind—though in a different way: total serialism had achieved the status of a religion whose followers defended and counter-attacked with all the fanaticism and intolerance of true believers. It needed the intrusion of John Cage into those closed European musical circles to alleviate a situation that had become intolerable. Even Boulez, hardly an innocent party in the proceedings, commented: 'In Darmstadt between 1952 and 1958 the discipline of serialization was so severe it was ridiculous. Cage represented a liberation from this.'

In 1958 Cardew attended concerts of American avant-garde music in Cologne by John Cage and David Tudor. The radical content of this music, its freshness and audacity, coupled with Tudor's phenomenal musicianship, made a deep impression on both Cardew and Stockhausen and was without doubt the source of inspiration for Cardew's indeterminate pieces of the early sixties, and probably for Stockhausen's first 'moment-form' works. Cardew's *Two Books of Study for Pianists*, completed in the year of Cage's visit to Cologne, reflects the disruption caused by the American invasion. The continuing influence of Stockhausen is discernible in the application of a scale of six dynamics and in particular in the mobile character of the material (within the given space of time the sounds may be distributed freely by the performer), but the ideological source of the music is to be sought elsewhere—the isolation of tones, the feeling of discontinuity (which later Cardew rather harshly criticised as 'laboured spontaneity') and the wayward harmonic language (though still constrained by European considerations of structure) reveal that the new American aesthetic had taken root in European music.

In an illuminating diary entry on 1 September 1964, in which he looks back on *Two Books of Study*, Cardew comments:

What I composed in this piece—the image that hovered in front of my mind's eye—was a 'Musizierweise' (Mode of music-making). I invented a way of making music and limited it to such an extent that musicians without construction ideas of their own are in a position to adopt this musizierweise.

The indication here is already of his moving away from music as object towards music as process, and of a concern for the problems of the performers. Cardew was one of the first Europeans to grasp not just the musical but also the social implications of the new American aesthetic. And this was because his response to the music was not merely a cerebral rejection of the predominant western European compositional method—total serialism—but a deep-seated reaction to content and meaning, to the new ways of thinking and feeling, to the idealism, both moral and philosophical, that seemed to inform the new American music. 'There is no room for the policeman in art', Cage said in one of his polemics against the Europeans. Cardew's originality was that he created out of the new aesthetic a kind of music utterly different from that of the Americans. The *String Quartet Movement* (1961), and in particular

February Pieces (1959-61) for piano solo, perfectly exemplify this new departure, prefiguring the ideological content of most of Cardew's output in the early sixties. The influence of both Cage and Stockhausen is residual; the music possesses a strong improvisatory quality, but the dangers of excessive subjectivism (self-indulgence) are circumvented by the highly idiosyncratic and individual application of aleatoric principles. The result is a curious, compelling discontinuity; weird juxtapositions, irrational outbursts, fleeting references to other musics, past and present, create a kind of psychological disorientation, a hypersensitive music which haunts and disturbs the memory, reflecting a mysterious, impenetrable world in total disorder.

This expression of human agency at large, the spontaneous quality in the music—albeit in a chaotic, incomprehensible environment—constituted Cardew's bourgeois humanist world outlook at that time; the thrust of his creative work throughout the sixties served to sharpen the various facets of the contradiction, the subject/object dichotomy, and this continued until he espoused dialectical materialism in the seventies. The late Bill Hopkins, that most perceptive of critics, made the point in his review of *Three Winter Potatoes* in the *Musical Times* in 1967: 'Cardew was compelled to weigh up the claims of artifice (selection and ordering) against those of the spontaneity which for him represents musical truth.'¹ Cardew himself expresses the dichotomy with reference to improvisation in a diary entry of 1967:

I compose systems. Sounds and potential sounds are around us all the time—they're all over. What you can do is to insert your logical construct into this seething mass—a system that enables some of it to become audible. That's why it's such an orgiastic experience to improvise—instead of composing a system to project into all this chaotic potential, you simply put yourself in there (you too are a system of sorts after all) and see what action that suicidal deed precipitates.²

For a short period serialism had been a source of intellectual fascination for Cardew and had acted as a 'logical construct' in his student works, but in the last analysis the mechanistic philosophy that underpinned it was anathema to him and he rebelled to free himself of it. This dualism—on the one hand asceticism, the desire and respect for dogma and purity (which also expressed itself in his preoccupation over a lengthy period from the age of 23 with Wittgenstein's writings and later with Marxism-Leninism), on the other hand the spontaneous and libertarian actions that characterised his life-style—is the key to an understanding of Cardew's motivations and achievements, both musical and political.

The references to serialism in his diaries are mostly negative and occasionally humorous. In 1967, by which time, of course, serialism was for him very much a thing of the past, he wrote:

Since the war Folk music has become dissipated and internationalized (at least in Europe and America) to the point that one can hardly call it folk music. This fate can be compared to the heroic pseudo-scientific universalism of serial music in the early 50s; at that time you were quite likely to hear serial compositions by a Bulgarian, a Japanese, or a South African on the same programme and be virtually unable to tell the difference between them. At that time serial music was not available on disc, so we may attribute the effect to the pervasiveness of the idea. However, death in a vacuum is not a happy thought and around 1960 many of the reputable composers were beating a hasty retreat, taking with them just as much of the original idea as they were able to carry. Nono went into political music. Stockhausen into the grand operatic tradition. Boulez into impressionism and a glorious career as a conductor.³

In a related entry, on 12 September 1967, he wrote: From America Columbus brought us back syphilis, or Death through sex; there is no reason why the compliment should not be returned with myself as the humble vehicle, in the form of total serialism—of Death through music. In the case of serialism the damage has already been done, Schoenberg is the bearer of that intolerable guilt.⁴

Having rejected both tonality and serialism, it was not surprising that a radically minded young composer should have felt attracted to the American avant garde. But in fact Cardew's admiration for Cage had little to do with Cage's compositional techniques (though he once described the notation for Cage's *Variations I* as a 'giant step forward');⁵ what he admired was Cage's rejection of the commodity fetishism that had invaded musical composition, for which the super-objectivity of serialism and its corollary, the preoccupation with the perfection of the ideal object, was largely to blame. What also impressed him was Cage's liberation of the performer from the constraints of oppressive notational complexities, and perhaps most of all the 'democracy' inherent (at least in theory) in Cage's scores. And here is the crux, because this concern for freedom and democracy, displayed in a number of highly sophisticated indeterminate compositions from the early sixties, though in an abstract and intellectualised fashion, informs Cardew's entire musical career. With him 'indeterminacy' was not simply another compositional technique, displacing a previously discredited one, it was a logical musical expression of his humanism: humanism is the vital thread that runs through all his musical activities, making for a continuity that overrides even the most radical stylistic changes in his work. His rejection of total serialism freed him as a composer; with his espousal of indeterminacy, creative freedom was also extended to the performer.

In the magazine *Performance* the composer David Bedford described his experience with Cardew's indeterminate pieces:

Speaking as a performer in many of Cardew's early works it must be said that the experience was totally rewarding. Our creativity was constantly being challenged, and the empathy of the performers, channelled into producing a coherent piece of music despite sometimes sketchy and sometimes paradoxical instructions, was often remarkable. It should be pointed out that none of Cardew's works ever gave total freedom to the performer. The instructions were a guide which focused each individual's creative instinct on a problem to be solved—how to interpret a particular system of notation using one's own musical background and attitudes.⁶

These comments highlight the all-important difference between Cage's and Cardew's applications of aleatoric techniques. Cage's notational systems presuppose a denial of the influence of musical background (that is, history), whether Cage's own or the performers', and moreover generally allow for no spontaneous expression during performance. The thrust of Cardew's musical development, already evident in the indeterminate scores of the early sixties, was in precisely the opposite direction—towards an ethnic, spontaneous music making, which found its ideal expression between the years 1966 and 1971 when Cardew was a member of the improvisation group AMM.

What Cardew did share with Cage was the ability to take calculated risks: risk taking is part and parcel of both indeterminacy and improvisation. *Octet 61*, for example, is an indeterminate piece, that is, the performer has an active hand in determining its form; it consists of 60 signs derived from conventional musical notation, each of which constitutes a single

musical event. The task for the performer is not only to interpret each sign but to join the signs together to create musical phrases, musical continuity (Example 1). Of the *Octet* Cardew wrote:

The greatest music is always explicit—like Webern, if you dig him. In *Octet 61* I realise that explicitness has been sacrificed. In this research it is always necessary to sacrifice trusted concepts. Afterthought. As long as there is no blur in the thinking . . .⁷

During the next five years, from 1963 to 1968, Cardew made two such sacrifices: the first was of traditional notation in favour of graphic notation; the second was of notation in favour of improvisation. Two activities tower above all others during this period: his mammoth 193-page graphic composition *Treatise*; and the improvisation group AMM. A diary entry on New Year's Day 1963 anticipates this radical development:

A good man watches, experiences, the complete devastation of his private world and survives. Then he moves back into the real world and grasps it with his mind. So he recreates it, and it is no longer private. It is everybody's world . . . To do something constructive you have to look beyond yourself. Humanity in general is your sphere (not people). Self-expression lapses too easily into mere documentation.

Later in the year, on 4 September, there is another philosophical entry, but now containing a direct reference to *Treatise*:

My age of romanticism is over. Sensations, moments drop away. My desire is to experience long-term continuities as beautiful.—In *Treatise* to create the coherent code which expresses the truths we do not know and cannot live up to . . . To be aware of the psychological groundings of your musical strivings (being, timid physically, as a boy, I became bold in spirit) and still leave the ground.

In Buffalo in 1966 Cardew described the genesis of *Treatise*:

I was 23 when I first came across Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: right from the first sentence, handwritten by Slad [David Sladen, an old school-friend] as a foretaste before he gave me the book. 'The world is everything that is the case.' It made a deep impression on me. The name *Treatise* (from *Tractatus*): a thorough investigation. Of what? Of everything, of nothing. Like the whole world of philosophy. I started work on it in 1963 and have worked on it inconsistently ever since. In that time it has lost some of its abstract quality, autobiographical aspects have crept in. But then there are autobiographical wisps to be read into Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*—the whole takes on a slightly different autobiographical slant in view of his later rejection of part of it.⁸

Treatise finally appeared complete in 1967. It is a continuous weaving and combining of a host of graphic elements (of which only a few are recognisably related to musical symbols) into a long visual composition, the meaning of which in terms of sounds is not specified in any way. Any number of musicians, using any media, are free to participate in a reading of the score, and each is free to interpret it in his own way. The graphic subject matter appears in various

guises: triangles, circles, circle derivations, squares, square derivations, irregular shapes, etc. (Example 2). One way of interpreting *Treatise* might be to match these graphic symbols with musical categories—triads, trills, irregular tremolos, periodic rhythms, etc.; shapes and positions of symbols could be used to determine, for example, dynamics. This might be the method of interpretation that a conventionally trained musician would adopt—a non-reading musician might take a much freer, more spontaneous approach. What Cardew wanted was that in playing *Treatise* 'each musician will give of his own music—he will give it as his response to my music, which is the score itself'.⁹

The history of *Treatise* is documented in detail by Cardew in the *Treatise Handbook*, which appeared in print some years after the completion of the score. The first part of the *Handbook* consists of working notes, which shed light on many aspects of Cardew's musical thought.

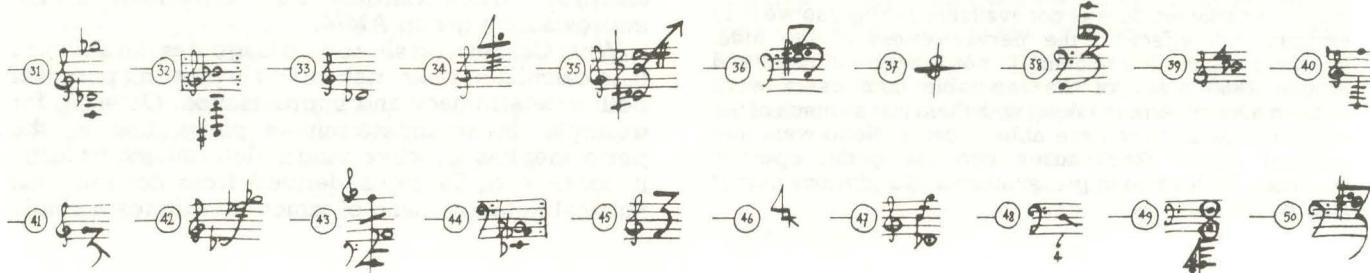
Notation is a way of making people move. If you lack other ways like aggression or persuasion. The notation should do it. This is the most rewarding aspect of work on a notation. Trouble is: Just as you find your sounds are too alien, intended 'for a different culture', you make the same discovery about your beautiful notation: no one is willing to understand it. No one moves.¹⁰

Visually *Treatise* is sensational, so beautiful as to be inhibiting for all but the boldest spirits—its visual impact disconcertingly puts most performances of it in the shade. *Treatise* releases music from the constraints of conventional notation; it demands new concepts of time, new sounds, and new attitudes to old sounds, which many classically trained musicians seem unable to bring to it.

In 1964–5 Cardew worked on a number of pieces concurrently with *Treatise*. But *Treatise* was the dominant activity to the extent that at least two of these pieces, *Bun no.2 for Orchestra* (1964) and *Volo Solo* (1965), are versions of *Treatise* in some form. Why 'Bun'? He gave me two off-the-cuff reasons when I asked him: a bun is what you give to an elephant at the zoo, and that was how he felt when he gave the work to an orchestra to play; and the piece is like a bun—filling but not substantial! Of the other works of this period *Material* (1964) is a transcription for any ensemble of harmony instruments of the *Third Orchestral Piece* (1960). *Three Winter Potatoes* was completed in 1965 and *Bun for Orchestra no.1* was written for Petrassi's composition course, which Cardew attended in Rome between February and June 1964.

David Bedford remarks that Cardew 'brought a typically English elegance and wit to even some of his apparently more eccentric compositions'. *Memories of You* and *Solo with Accompaniment* (both 1964) are two cases in point, but an ironic gloss conceals their true significance. Both these works seem to be nostalgic reflections on Cardew's musical past, referring respectively to the two composers whose influence shaped his early career. *Memories of You* is

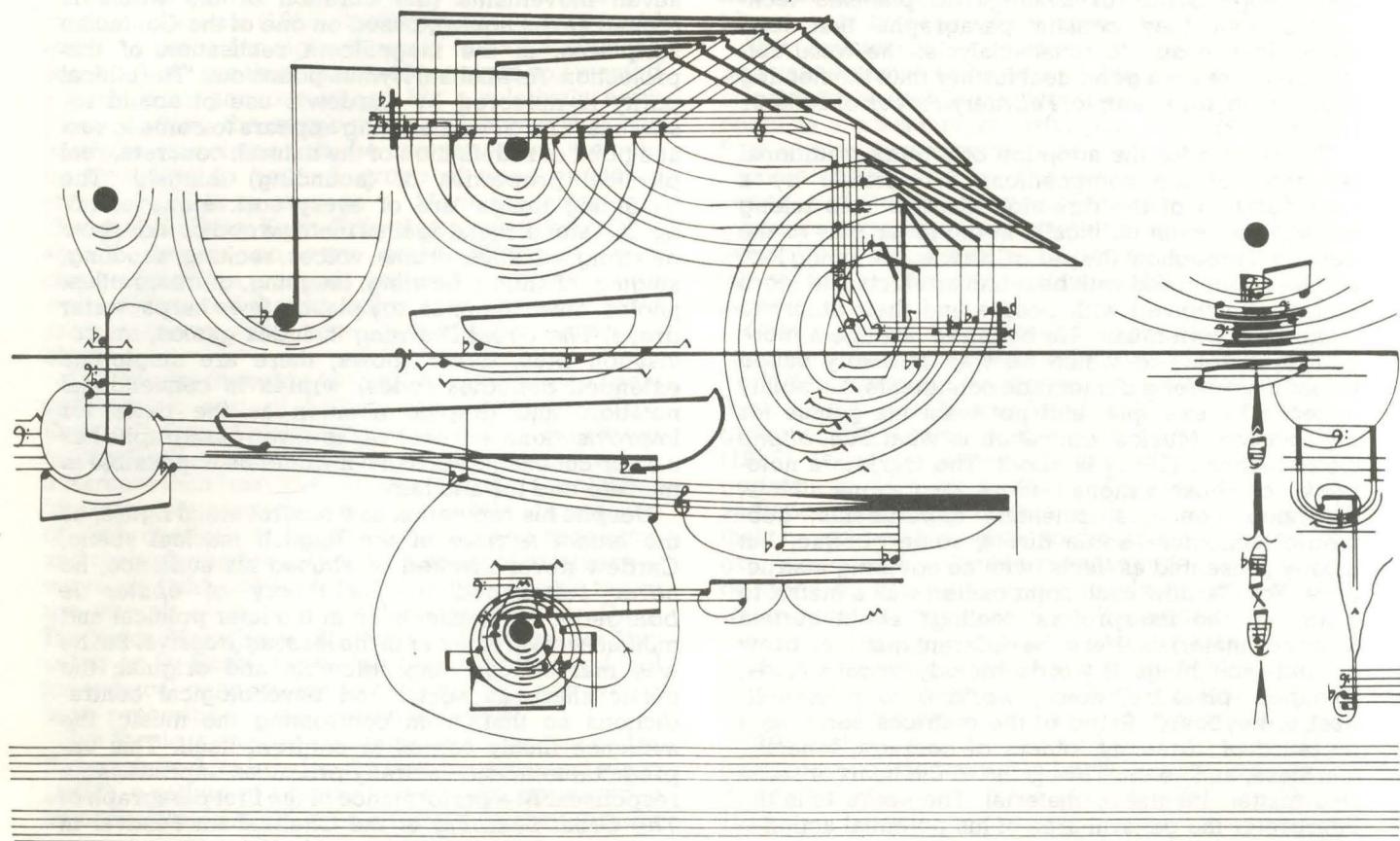
Example 1 Octet 61



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Example 2 *Treatise*

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a homage to Cage. The score consists of 22 diagrams of a grand piano with instructions to make sounds at specific points in and around it; Cage's *Concert for piano and orchestra* (1957-8) contains virtually the same notation. The accompaniment part of *Solo with Accompaniment* consists of a number of 'matrices'; the parameters of the basic elements in a matrix wax and wane according to the composer's complex system of notation, which seems to allude to Stockhausen's *Plus-Minus*. The relatively simple solo part is thrown into sharp relief by an extremely busy and complex accompaniment so that an ironical comment is made on the traditional relationship between the two.

In AMM Cardew encountered, perhaps for the first time, musicians as uncompromising as himself, who had already entered the uncharted territory of improvisation and who would risk all in the making of each performance. A short entry in Cardew's diary for 1965 reads like a prophetic description of AMM music:

Music is a vagrant; it has no fixed abode. It's a menace to society. It needs cleaning up. The impossibility of abolishing music. Its omnipresence. Its uncatchability. Perhaps after all we have to step down and let music pursue its own course.¹¹

The importance of AMM for Cardew cannot be overestimated, as he acknowledged himself. Mutual understanding within the group reached a depth that he had never experienced in concert-hall music. The four original members of AMM were Keith Rowe, Eddie Prévost, Lou Gare, and Lawrence Sheaff, all of whom came from a jazz background. They met regularly for sessions that generally lasted about two hours, with no formal breaks or interruptions, though there would sometimes occur extended periods of near silence. In an essay entitled 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation' Cardew wrote:

It is not the exclusive privilege of music to have a history—sound has history too. Industry and modern technology have added machine sounds and electronic sounds to the primeval sounds of thunderstorm, volcanic eruption, avalanche and tidal wave. It is to the 'history of sound' that AMM tries to contribute something. 'Informal' sound has a power over our emotional responses that 'formal' music does not, in that it acts subliminally rather than on a cultural level. This is a possible definition of the area in which AMM is experimental. We are searching for sounds and for responses that attach to them, rather than thinking them up, preparing them and producing them. The search is conducted in the medium of sound and the musician himself is at the heart of the experiment.¹²

It was the humanising component of spontaneity in improvised music, which finds expression in the creative dialogue between musicians at the point of music making, that Cardew valued so highly. In AMM he found the embodiment of his ideas and feelings about music and freedom taken a stage further. On the relationship between *Treatise* and AMM he wrote in 1970:

I now regard *Treatise* as a transition between my earlier preoccupation with problems of musical notation and my present concerns—improvisation and a musical life. Joining AMM was the turning point, both in the composition of *Treatise* and in everything I had thought about music up to then.¹³

The latter part of the sixties and the early seventies parallel the immediately preceding period: *Treatise* and AMM, the related dominant preoccupations of the earlier period, are matched in the later one by two mutually determining activities—*The Great Learning* and the Scratch Orchestra.

The monumental *Great Learning* (1968-70), Cardew's masterpiece, incorporates experimental techniques into tonal and even modal frameworks. Indeed, it is a significant feature of many of the pieces of this period, including *Volo Solo* and *Three Winter*

Potatoes (both 1965)—brilliant virtuoso piano works and compendiums of avant-garde pianistic techniques—that they contain paragraphs that lend themselves easily to tonal analysis; the tonal references here go a good deal further than the fleeting allusions in, for example, *February Pieces* of 1959-61 (Example 3).

The reason for the adoption of a more traditional language in his compositions is clarified by a consideration of the direction Cardew was taking socially and even politically in the latter part of the decade. Throughout the period he was becoming less and less concerned with beautiful artefacts and more and more involved with people and their ability to make their own music. He began to assume a more educative role—to which he was perfectly suited through his strong democratic sentiments, his ability to teach by example, and not least his genius for improvising. Musical education is what *Schooltime Compositions* (1967) is about. The work is a notebook of observations, ideas, notations, hints, diagrams, concepts, scientific experiments, geometric analogies—some direct, some oblique, but mostly presented as ‘facts’ with no covering instructions. For Cardew each composition was a matrix to draw out the interpreters’ feelings about certain topics or materials. Here the different matrices grew around such things as words, melody, vocal sounds, triangles, pleasure, noise, working to rule, will/desire, keyboard. Some of the matrices serve as a measure of virtuosity, others of courage, tenacity, alertness, and so on. They point to the heart of some real matter, mental or material. The score tells the interpreter the general area of his potential action—he may wish or have the talent to play, or sing, or construct, or illuminate, or take exercise of one sort or another, and can draw out his interpretation in that direction.

For Cardew there were no two ways about it: people could be encouraged, inspired, or even cajoled, but ultimately they had to be trusted to make their own music on the basis of their own background, experience, and attitudes. In these new compositions he subtly defines the areas—emotional, physical, psychological, and historical—in which the performer operates, but there is no question of controlling the interpretation, either directly or by some back-door method involving ‘chance operations’. At the same time, however, he was still grappling with the idea of involving musically educated people (people trained in musical establishments) in his compositions. In 1967 he wrote:

I see no possibility of turning to account the tremendous musical potential that musically educated people evidently represent, except by providing them with what they want: traditionally notated scores of maximum complexity. The most hopeful fields are those of choral and orchestral writing since there the individual personality (which a musical education seems so often to thwart) is absorbed into a larger organism, which speaks through its individual members as if from some higher sphere.¹⁴

Example 3 *Three Winter Potatoes*, no.2

The Great Learning, a large-scale choral work in seven movements (the duration of the whole is around seven hours), based on one of the Confucian scriptures, is the magnificent realisation of this projection. As Michael Nyman points out: ‘The ethical purity is mirrored by Cardew’s use of sound resources. *The Great Learning* appears to come to rest at a point of redefinition of the natural, concrete, real physical properties of (sounding) things’.¹⁵ The ‘sounding things’ are of every sort: stone struck against stone, metal against metal, wood on skin, bow on string, whistles, drums, voices, reciting, shouting, singing, chanting, howling, laughing, güiros, rattles, jingles, musical boxes, toy pianos, jews harps, water drops. *The Great Learning* includes games, improvisation rites, dumb shows; there are single-line extended melodies (odes) written in conventional notation, and graphic notation as the basis for improvisations. But each of the seven paragraphs has a clear-cut image, such that it would be impossible to mistake one for another.

Despite his reputation as a controversial figure, as the *enfant terrible* of the English musical scene, Cardew never insulted or abused his audience, he never subscribed to the theory of *épater le bourgeois*; his music, even in the later political and militant works, is never in the least aggressive. But he was marvellously unpredictable and original: the music sharpens social and psychological contradictions so that, from confronting the music, the audience finally comes to confront itself. This unpredictable music naturally produces unpredictable responses. At a performance of the first paragraph of *The Great Learning* at the Cheltenham Festival in 1968 the audience split into two factions, one supporting and one opposing the music, which because of the uproar could hardly be heard. In the artists’ room after the concert an elderly gentleman, who looked like a retired colonel, pushed through the crowd to confront the composer; he grabbed Cardew’s hand and said: ‘Thank you Mr Cardew, what a relief to hear your music after all this horrible modern stuff.’

The Scratch Orchestra, to whom *The Great Learning* is dedicated, was founded by Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton and Cardew himself, and emerged out of Cardew’s composition class at Morley College in London in 1969 (in fact at least two paragraphs of *The Great Learning* had been completed before the Scratch Orchestra was formed). It was an enterprising body of around 40 performers of varied skills, who played all kinds of experimental music—by Cage, Cardew, Wolff, Riley, Young, Rzewski, and themselves—in all kinds of situations and for all classes of people: for Cornish farm-workers in village squares, for the young industrial workers of the north-east, and for both urban and rural communities on the Continent, as well as for music lovers who frequented the Royal Festival Hall. The Scratch Orchestra consisted of an assortment of people from various walks of life, some of them with considerable artistic talent, who loved and

¹⁴Universal Edition (London) Ltd. Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers

needed music. There was no more enthusiastic, more committed collection of individuals working in the field of contemporary art at that time.

Despite the ultra-democratic procedures that the Scratch Orchestra evolved for every aspect of its activities, Cardew was very much the unproclaimed authority, a father figure to whom people looked for guidance and inspiration. The Scratch Orchestra bore his stamp, and in fact it was the embodiment and realisation of the ideas he had formulated about musical life over a long period. The first two years of the Scratch Orchestra's existence were idyllic, and the performances and compositional output were prolific. But the nature and intensity of its activities created problems, and complaints and disillusionment began to surface. Cardew opened a 'discontent file', which functioned therapeutically for a while but did not relieve the underlying tensions. The situation eventually reached crisis point. At one of the meetings two members of the Orchestra presented an analysis of the predicament, which pinpointed a fundamental disunity of theory and practice as the principal source of discontent and frustration: in theory the Scratch Orchestra believed in integration and gregariousness, in practice it was isolationist and parochial; in theory it rejected the musical establishment, in practice it asked for support (Arts Council grants, BBC television and Festival Hall appearances); in theory it wished to be an instrument of inspiration, in practice it appeared to many as a pessimistic symptom of a system in decay; and so on. The Scratch Orchestra was trapped in the classic anarchist's dilemma; it willed one thing and caused its opposite. The corner-stone of the analysis was a lengthy quotation from the English Marxist Christopher Caudwell, which generated considerable discussion. The passage concerned, which comes from Caudwell's essay on D. H. Lawrence, deals with the function of art and the role of the artist in bourgeois society:

But art is not in any case a relation to a thing, it is a relation between men, between artist and audience, and the art work is only like a machine which they must both grasp as part of the process. The commercialisation of art may revolt the sincere artist, but the tragedy is that he revolts against it still within the limitations of bourgeois culture. He attempts to forget the market completely and concentrate on his relation to the art work, which now becomes still further hypostatised as an entity-in-itself. Because the art work is now completely an end-in-itself, and even the market is forgotten, the art process becomes an extremely individualistic relation. The social values inherent in the art form, such as syntax, tradition, rules, technique, form, accepted tonal scale, now seem to have little value, for the art work more and more exists for the individual alone.¹⁶

The Caudwell essay made (I believe) a profound impression on Cardew, not because it imparted new thoughts, but because it crystallised his own thoughts and feelings, and he began to identify with Marxism. The formation of the Scratch Orchestra was the culmination of Cardew's career within—or at least on the fringes of—the musical establishment. His profound commitment to the democratic ideals of the Orchestra led inevitably to his, and several other members', politicisation. His socialism was the logical consequence not just of his involvement with the Scratch Orchestra but of the experiences and direction of his life up to that point. His deeply rooted morality and tenacious humanism finally found a political purpose, which embraced and broadened previous preoccupations and achievements.

Inevitably Cardew's music changed, but not as violently as some critics have tried to make out. *The Turtledove* for voice and piano is an interesting

product of a period of transition. Written in 1973, it is the third of *Three Bourgeois Songs*, settings of Chinese poems from an anthology selected by Confucius, and is an arrangement for voice and piano of a melody from Paragraph 5 of *The Great Learning*. In an introduction to a performance of the songs Cardew wrote:

The reason for presenting these songs is to get to grips with bourgeois thought, bourgeois emotions. In short, what is bourgeois ideology? . . . The third song, *Turtledove*, purports to have been written by a woman, this time in praise of her ruler. He is depicted as the wise, benevolent, generous and modest ruler, above all he is the mirror of nature—his way is natural, therefore destined to survive 10,000 years. It is not hard to see who these sentiments serve. In the first poem they serve the man, and in this one they serve the ruler. Further, they glorify the social relations that put the man or the ruler in the position he's in. For this reason, no matter whether written by the lowest serving-maid, these poems are ruling-class ideology. That's the intellectual side. What about the emotional side? Basically ecstatic submission, either to the power of the man, or to the eternal processes of nature whereby the master knows best just like the mother turtle over her children.¹⁷

In the early seventies Cardew spent considerable time and energy criticising and repudiating his earlier works, including *The Great Learning*. In China the Communist party had initiated an anti-Confucius campaign in which, as a European supporter of Mao, Cardew participated vigorously. His subsequent repudiation of Maoism may invalidate part (but certainly not all) of his fierce polemic against the avant garde in his book, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974), which was written during his Maoist period. He claimed that the aspirations of the avant garde, which had attracted young composers like himself, had turned into their opposites. Scientific investigation had become mystical pseudo-science—for example, in Stockhausen's *Gruppen* investigation of the structures of vocal sound had been applied in a totally unscientific way. Consciousness and sensitivity had become super-consciousness in an ever-narrowing sphere—for example, the human ability to cope with mathematical relationships and other complexities of performance had developed at the expense of social consciousness and the ability to communicate. And consciousness of the formal problems had increased so much as to exclude consciousness of the content. Progress and discovery at the frontiers of a new kind of music had become detached from the source of all progress and discovery, namely the life of the people; cut off from this source the new music had withered and died, and inevitably become a reactionary weight holding back further development. The avant garde had finally made the transition from illusion to disillusion.

At the time of his death I think it is true to say that Cardew's position on the avant garde and modernism had not changed. But he had shown a renewed interest in improvised music, and on Keith Rowe's invitation he had agreed to take part in an AMM performance of *Treatise*. The blanket repudiation of the past was associated with the discredited Mao, and in a speech on 'Culture', which Cardew delivered at an Internationalist Youth Concert in London on 9 August 1980, as representative of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), he said: 'When we say "new culture", "proletarian culture", we mean, as Lenin said, a culture which must assimilate and rework the best of all previous cultures.' Cardew's position may have begun to approximate to Brecht's who remarked that there was no need to worry about presenting bold and unusual material to a working-class audience as long

as the members of that audience felt they could relate to the content of what was presented to them, as long as that content corresponded in some way to their reality.

Hanns Eisler, a composer whom Cardew greatly admired, once said: 'I have always striven to write music that serves Socialism. This was often a difficult and contradictory exercise, but the only worthy one for artists of our time.'¹⁸ Throughout the last ten years of his life Cardew grappled with this 'difficult and contradictory exercise' and it is part of the tragedy of his death that, in the opinion of many, he was on the brink of achieving a valid and meaningful result. Initially he made what he himself regarded as bad errors, such as his commitment to Maoism, but his active involvement in politics gave his artistic work a new focus and direction. In 1980 he organised and directed an international choir at the International Youth Camp in Germany.

I'm convinced [he once wrote] that when a group of people get together and sing the Internationale this is a more complex, more subtle, a stronger and more musical experience than the whole of the avant garde put together. This is not a pseudo-scientific fantasy but represents real people in the real world engaged in the most important struggle of all—the class struggle.

Cardew took up the struggle in the field of music and culture, performing and singing at May Day and anti-fascist demonstrations, and in support of the Irish people's struggle for national liberation. He played in many parts of Ireland, including the Andersonstown Community Centre, a Republican stronghold in Belfast, where during his performance of *Lid of me Granny's Bin* four armed British soldiers entered the hall and began to harass the audience. Later Cardew and his musician colleagues were arrested by the RUC, held and questioned for several hours.

Cardew's commitment to socialism during the last decade of his life is awe-inspiring. His notebooks reveal the depth of his study of Marx and Lenin and, most important, the way in which he applied these principles to every situation. His activity reached heroic proportions: he was involved 24 hours a day, composing, performing, touring, organising, writing, lecturing, analysing, meeting, discussing, demonstrating on the streets (for which he was imprisoned), and militantly opposing a decadent exploitative system and its ugly, ever growing offspring, racism-fascism. An entry in his diary reads:

The artist should think to himself do I really want the revolution to come? Or is it simply an 'inspiring' possibility to juggle with? Genuinely desiring the revolution, this implies the correct class stand and the proletarian world outlook. Only from this position can the 'benefit of the people' really be considered. The people will benefit (in the long term) only through revolution. Making the revolution = serving the people. Two questions that occupy me at present. The necessity of building the Party. The necessity of building revolutionary culture.

He recognised that these tasks were enormous. On the problem of presenting political music, revolutionary music, to an audience, he wrote:

Music backs up, supports the social conscience of its audience (which is also its indirect producer). Thus when we try and write revolutionary music for the usual audience we're faced with the insurmountable problem of giving it a form that backs up the bourgeois class consciousness of the audience. If we succeed then the revolutionary content is turned around to serve the bourgeois audience in its ideas and prejudices. If we fail, then the revolutionary content remains but does not touch the audience—you get the negative reaction either on the grounds that it's bad music, or on the grounds that it is an attack on the audience (on their bourgeois consciousness).

Elsewhere Cardew gives a concrete example of this complex composer-audience relationship. A diary entry in 1973 reads:

The East is Red, for violin and piano, is a virtuoso piece, depicting the transformation of a simple folk tune into a solemn national anthem and then showing the lilt of the folk tune within that; it was played in a concert of modern music in the British Centre Berlin on Feb. 10th. The audience responded enthusiastically and the piece was played again; the other pieces were received with sighs and groans. The critics could make nothing of it; one could not make out whether it was ironic, and another could not detect any critique of socialism in the piece. Was I backward to compose it? Were the people backward to enjoy it? This is nonsense. There is nothing to be gained by restricting the productive activity of artists.¹⁹

The majority of compositions during this period were political songs, written usually with a specific function in mind. He collaborated on songs with his American socialist composer friends Wolff and Rzewski; songs for Brecht's *The Measures Taken* (1976) were written in collaboration with the 'Songs for our Society' class at Goldsmiths' College; and *Resistance Blues* (1976) was composed for a concert at Brixton Prison. *Bethanien Song* (1974) exemplifies Cardew's internationalism; it was written for a campaign (in which Cardew himself was active) to save a children's hospital in one of the poorest quarters of West Berlin. The authorities had planned to pull down the hospital and erect an 'artists' centre' in its place. In an introduction to the song Cardew explained:

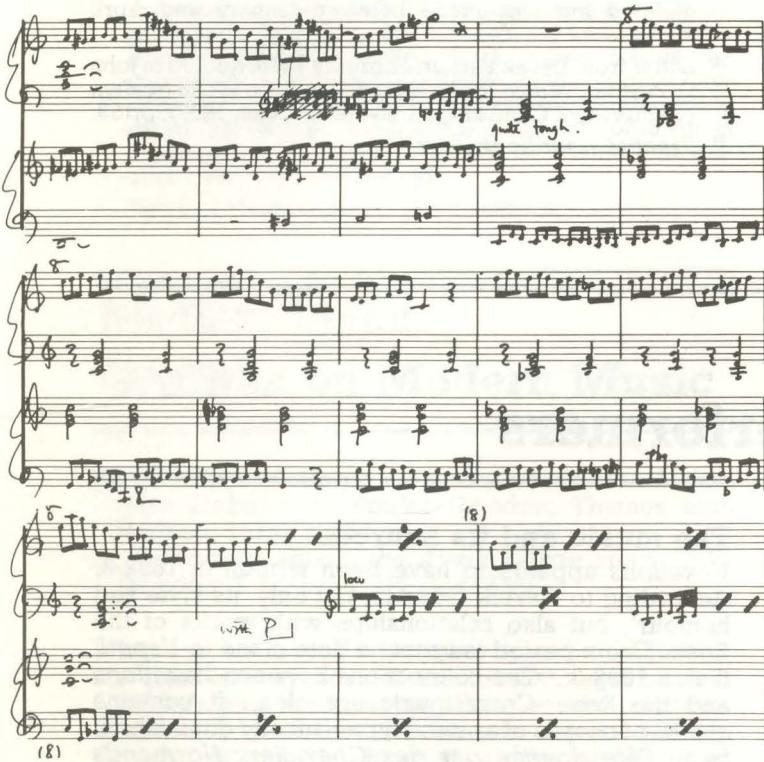
It [*Bethanien Song*] embodies our demand for a children's polyclinic in Bethanien, not an artists' centre. It sings of our children's future, threatened by the myriad abuses of capitalist society. It derides bourgeois art, exposes the politics of the urban planners, and indicates the perspectives of revolutionary change, with the working people of all nationalities uniting to take their destiny into their own hands.

Bethanien Song was taken up by the people and became the rallying song for the huge campaign.

As well as some instrumental solo pieces—*Mountains* (1977) for bass clarinet, and *The Workers' Song* (1978) for violin—Cardew produced several large-scale 'concert' works for piano during the seventies: *Piano Album* (1973), *Thälmann Variations* (1974), *Vietnam Sonata* (1976), *Boolavogue* (1981) for two pianos, and *We Sing for the Future* (1981). The pieces in *Piano Album* are the first essays in a new piano style. In the accompanying notes Cardew wrote:

I have discontinued composing music in an avant-garde idiom for a number of reasons: the exclusiveness of the avant-garde, its fragmentation, its indifference to the real situation in the world today, its individualistic outlook and not least its class character (the other characteristics are virtually products of this).

Cardew's concern for the English national tradition became increasingly evident in the later years, not only in his speeches and conversations but also in his music. Arrangements of songs such as *Watkinson's 13* and *The Blackleg Miner* reflect his commitment to folk and popular music, while both *Boolavogue* and *We Sing for the Future* clearly reveal a debt to 16th- and 17th-century art music—the influence of the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, for example, is apparent in sections of *Boolavogue* (Example 4). At the same time there are textures and rhythmic devices which, in an interesting way, betray the influence of Cardew's earlier, avant-garde music. He was still an 'experimentalist', but now the music is imbued with a spirit of passion and drive which reflects the intense political life he was leading. Cardew did not really

Example 4 *Boolavogue*

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begin to write 'different' music in the seventies; it was always his music, which developed and changed inexorably on the basis of his activity as a committed revolutionary.

In his obituary in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 29 December 1981 Dieter Schnebel wrote, 'Cardew's originality lies in his abandonment of originality'; he went on to remark that whatever influences Cardew quite openly embraced—whether Cage, Stockhausen, Petrassi, or even Tchaikovsky—all his music bears an unmistakable, individual stamp. What Cardew renounced over the last ten years was the market mentality, a corollary of which in the West has been an obsession with 'originality', the often unconscious need to produce something 'new' at all costs. In this sense he abandoned originality, but never his individuality, which he consciously placed in the service of the socialist collective.

The composer John Paynter quoted a letter from *The Guardian*:

Having sat through most of Act 1 of a ballet at the Royal Opera House while two ladies next to me talked incessantly I risked a polite remonstrance. One of them replied, 'But it's only music.' Is there any reply to this?²⁰

Cardew would have relished such an opportunity more than most. Over the last ten years of his life he came to see the development of music as inseparable from man's struggle against privilege, injustice, systematised greed, and exploitation. He believed that it was only through the combination of artistic and political action that contemporary music could be dragged out of its isolation.

Cornelius Cardew was a complex man. If we neglect or ignore aspects of his character because they are uncomfortable, we are in danger of doing both him and ourselves a disservice, and we shall neither understand nor appreciate his life. Cardew became a revolutionary; he was always a poet. Soon after his death an American composer friend, Alvin Curran, wrote in a letter to me, 'Cornelius was always

a true revolutionary, but his poetry was far more interesting and natural.' In the heat of the last ten years it has been easy to forget the poetry. (He had put it aside himself, though it always emerged.) His best music and music making had a floating, poetic quality: the inscription at the beginning of one of his last pieces, *Boolavogue*, reads 'try and make it float'; the same quality characterised his performances of Feldman's music in the early days, and his bold but sensitive piano playing is turned to great advantage in his recordings of Ives's violin sonatas with János Négyesy.

In his essay 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation' Cardew includes seven virtues that a musician can develop. The seventh virtue is the acceptance of death. The essay ends with these prophetic lines:

From a certain point of view improvisation is the highest mode of musical activity, for it is based on the acceptance of music's fatal weakness and essential and most beautiful characteristic—its transience.

The desire always to be right is an ignoble taskmaster, as is the desire for immortality. The performance of any vital action brings us closer to death; if it didn't it would lack vitality. Life is a force to be used and if necessary used up. 'Death is the virtue in us going to its destination.' [Lieh Tzu]²¹

My last memory of Cornelius Cardew is of an anti-fascist concert, which he had organised himself, only a week before he was killed. He was playing the piano, accompanying, and singing to a packed audience in a community hall in Camden. Many members of London ethnic groups were in the audience and participating. It was a far cry from the international festival of contemporary music where he had begun his career, but it was the destination he had consciously chosen, and which he had reached by forcing his music into life, by making the act of composition something more than the mere manipulation of sound.

John Tilbury is chairman of The Cornelius Cardew Foundation, which has been set up to promote the appreciation and understanding of music, with particular reference to the life and work of Cornelius Cardew. The Foundation aims to publish and make available Cardew's works, to encourage performances of his music, and to help young composers who share his aims and aspirations. More information may be obtained from the Cornelius Cardew Foundation, 26 Leyton Park Road, London E10.

¹ *Musical Times*, vol.108 (1967), p.739.

² Diary entry, 18 January 1967, headed 'Lecture for Univ. of Illinois 25.11.67'.

³ Notes for a lecture delivered at the State University of New York at Buffalo, 1967.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Diary entry, 1 September 1964.

⁶ *Performance* (April-May 1982).

⁷ Diary entry, 17 February 1963, headed 'for lecture on Indeterminacy'.

⁸ Diary entry, headed 'Nov 18th 66 Buffalo'; Cardew was living in Buffalo at that time.

⁹ *Treatise Handbook* (London: Peters Edition, 1971), p.x.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.iii.

¹¹ Diary entry, 25 February 1965.

¹² *Treatise Handbook*, p.xviii.

¹³ From the introduction to a BBC broadcast of *Treatise* on 8 February 1970.

- ¹⁴ *Treatise Handbook*, p.xix.
- ¹⁵ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), p.104.
- ¹⁶ Christopher Caudwell, *The Concept of Freedom* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965), pp.11-13.
- ¹⁷ Diary entry, headed 'Concert, March 5th 1973'.
- ¹⁸ Address delivered to a conference of delegates from the German Composers and Musicologists Union, Berlin, 23-4 February 1957.

- ¹⁹ From an article entitled 'Propaganda through the Medium of Art', handwritten in the diary; the entry is undated but was made between January and April 1973.
- ²⁰ Letter from Derek Parker, February 1980; quoted in John F. Paynter, *Music in the Secondary School Curriculum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.133.
- ²¹ *Treatise Handbook*, p.xx.

Gavin Bryars 'Vexations' and its Performers

This article was written in 1979 for a monograph on Erik Satie, edited by Ornella Volta, in the series *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*; the book was intended for publication in 1980 but has been delayed and is now expected to appear shortly. The article as it is published here is a revised version of the original English text.

In 1971 Christopher Hobbs and I performed Satie's *Vexations* at Leicester Polytechnic. I began the piece at 7 a.m. and Hobbs took over at 9.25 a.m. During the performance I noticed that while I marked my counting of the repetitions at the end of each one, Hobbs marked his at the beginning. And so, in order to prevent the possibility of our miscounting the 840 repetitions, I wrote a short note to Hobbs drawing his attention to this fact. (Since each of us was either playing or listening there was never any occasion on which we could converse during the whole of the piece.) Hobbs replied on the same sheet of paper, adding some observations on the way the performance was going, and gradually, quite fortuitously, a correspondence developed in which each performer made remarks to the other in a conversational way. Afterwards, on reading through these spontaneous notes, we decided that we should publish them in some form; written during the playing of the piece, they are curiously moving, and give an unusual insight into the kinds of mental processes that the work evokes in its performers. I decided, further, to find observations on *Vexations* by others who had performed it, or who had been intimately acquainted with it, and to publish these as an anthology. The anthology was advertised in the Experimental Music Catalogue in 1975 as being 'in preparation', but it has not yet appeared.

Vexations has had an enormous impact on recent music, partly because of its celebrated proportions (a sort of 'Ring des Nibelungen des pauvres'), and partly because of the effect it has had on those who have performed it. But it is clear from an examination of the details of the various performances that its executants have not all approached it in the same spirit, nor have they fixed anything like a common duration for the piece. In this respect the record of the performances provides a picture of the kinds of distortion to which Satie's work is prone, and the kinds of indulgence that its performers tend to perpetrate. By looking at the ways in which *Vexations* has been played it is possible to arrive at an assessment of what constitutes a good performance, and even to achieve some sort of insight into the nature of the piece itself.

The music and its sources

Vexations appears to have been written in 1892-3. According to Patrick Gowers, not only 'its style and humour', but also relationships with works of the Rose+Croix period 'suggest a date close to *Uspud*, that is 1892-3'.¹ The connections between *Vexations* and the Rose+Croix music are clear: it contains chains of chords of a single type—mostly diminished, as in *Fête donnée par des Chevaliers Normands* (1892); the lines move along in implacable note-against-note correspondence; and the bass and treble tend generally to go in contrary motion (see Example 1). Like the *Fête donnée par des Chevaliers Normands* and the *Messe des pauvres* (c1893-5) *Vexations* takes the 'ecclesiastical' form of a bass theme followed by a superimposed harmonisation; these are then repeated, the upper parts being inverted at the second occurrence. This is all the work consists of apart from a beautiful instruction at the head of the manuscript: 'Pour se jouer 840 fois de suite ce motif, il sera bon de se préparer au préalable, et dans le plus grand silence, par des immobilités sérieuses'. A curious feature of several American performances during the 1960s was that newspaper reviews gave the date of composition of *Vexations* as 'c1920'. This date, which seems to stem from a common (mistaken) source, could have arisen from descriptions of the piece as having an effect akin to *musique d'ameublement*, the first example of which was written in 1920; but there can be little doubt that the music is located firmly in the early 1890s.

One important aspect of *Vexations* that has not been examined to date is the manuscript itself. In all the performances that are listed below either the printed edition or a reproduction of the manuscript (or copies of either of these) served as the source. A close look at Satie's original, a privilege accorded to few people, reveals something quite striking about the work, which cannot be detected even from facsimiles. When Ornella Volta showed me the manuscript she pointed out that the main body of the music is written in a strong dark ink, whereas all the words and the 'signs', including the clefs, are in a very faint and faded ink. It appears that Satie watered down his ink after the music had been written in order to add these elements. (The manuscript has undergone restorative surgery at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, involving the injection of ink—necessarily of the same type as the original—into the defective areas so that the instructions, which make the piece what it is, shall not fade entirely.) The evidence provided by the ink shows that the

sequence of composition (contrary to the belief of Christian Wolff and others in the early Cage performance—see Wolff's letter quoted below) was first the music, then the title, and only afterwards the conditions under which it could be played. The ink was watered down during the writing of the word 'Vexations', after the letter 'x'.

It is worth mentioning, too, the significance of the linguistic elements. Satie calls the whole piece a 'motif', that is to say something that by nature returns time and time again. He also refers to the bass melody, which precedes each harmonisation, as a 'thème'. Using a simple Rousselian method of letter substitution, 'theme and variations' become 'theme and vexations' . . .

The manuscript of *Vexations* was formerly in the collection of Mme Claude Rostand in Geneva and is now in the collection of the Fondation Erik Satie in Paris. It was first reproduced in *Contrepoincts*, vol.6 (1949), opposite p.8, in an editorial by Fred Goldbeck, who refers to 'cette pièce (qui semble poser en principe que l'infini commence immédiatement après la 840^e reprise, et peut-être même un peu avant)'. Cage has told me how, following the Satie concerts he gave at Black Mountain College in 1948, he began collecting Satie's music; 'it was through Henri Sauguet that I was able to have photostats made of *Vexations*'.² According to Peter Dickinson, it was thanks to Cage that *Contrepoincts* published the score.³ The first American publication of the piece was in *Art News Annual*, vol.27 (1958), to which Cage contributed an article on Satie in the form of an imaginary dialogue.⁴ He mentions that Satie has lost the power to irritate, and goes on:

Example 1 Satie, *Vexations* from *Pages mystiques* (1893-5)

NOTE DE L'AUTEUR:

Pour se jouer 840 fois de suite ce motif, il sera bon de se préparer au préalable, et dans le plus grand silence, par des immobilités sérieuses

♩ Très lent

♩ A ce signe il sera d'usage de présenter le thème de la Basse

THÈME

True, one could not endure a performance of *Vexations* (lasting [my estimate] twenty-four hours; 840 repetitions of a fifty-two beat piece itself involving a repetitive structure: A, A₁, A, A₂, each A thirteen measures long), but why give it a thought?⁵

The first English publication of the music was in an article by Peter Dickinson in *Music Review*, vol.28 (1967), pp.139-46; the score (reset, not a facsimile) is on p.145. This was the version that Richard Toop saw and which gave him the idea for his performance. The work was eventually published in its own right by Editions Max Eschig in 1969 as one of three pieces in a collection entitled *Pages mystiques*.

It is curious that the work had been publicly known for such a long time before it was first played in its entirety. As late as 1958 Cage seems to have been discounting the possibility of a performance. One might speculate that it was not until musical sensibilities were better attuned to extremely long performances that a climate existed in which this music could thrive.

Performers and performances

The first performance of the piece that I know of was given in 1958 by Richard David Hames when he was 13 years old. Dr Hames tells me that he performed it at his school and that there was 'an audience of at least 10 throughout the proceedings'; he adds that the recital raised £24 for charity. This was only the first of four performances that Hames seems to have attempted, but of the others, two were not undertaken in a serious spirit and were incomplete: the second was at the American Center in Paris in 1970,

when, as the final item in a programme of French music, Hames repeated the piece until there was no more audience—which took '3 hours 12½ minutes'; the third version in the Hames tetralogy, which Hames refers to as an 'unscheduled happening', took place at Sevenoaks in Kent on 2 July 1971 and lasted only five hours. The fourth version was more serious in intent. In his earliest letters to me Hames stated that the first performance was the only complete one that he did, which is remarkable for a 13-year-old schoolboy. However, he never gave clear answers to a number of questions concerning the precise details of his performances—how he went about counting the repetitions, what was the total duration in each case, and so on—which makes me cautious in advancing a claim for the 1958 performance as the pioneering act it may have been; this hesitation on my part is compounded by the evidence of the later, foolish enterprises, which cast some doubt on the credibility of the earliest one.

The best-known and most influential performance of *Vexations* was that organised by John Cage at the Pocket Theater, New York, in September 1963. Cage had planned to give the piece at the Living Theater, but owing to the objections of people living nearby this proved impossible. In the end Lewis Lloyd offered the Pocket Theater. Cage used twelve pianists in all—ten officially involved and two substitutes. According to Philip Corner's list these were: John Cage, David Tudor, Christian Wolff, Philip Corner, Viola Farber, Robert Wood, MacRae Cook, John Cale, David Del Tredici, James Tenney, Howard Klein (the *New York Times* reviewer, who was asked to play in the course of the event) and Joshua Rifkin. They played for 18 hours 40 minutes. Christian Wolff writes:

The performance of *Vexations* is hard to forget. I'm often telling people about it. Two things particularly stick in my mind. The first was the effect of the music on the players. Aside from agreeing to the mechanics of sitting on stage, playing, staying on to count repetitions for the following pianist, all according to schedule, the pianists had neither rehearsal together nor had had any discussion about the playing. As the first cycle of pianists went round the playing was quite diverse, a variety—quite extreme, from the most sober and cautious to the wilful and effusive—of personalities was revealed. Musically the effect seemed disturbing. But after another round the more expansive players began to subside, the more restrained to relax, and by the third round or so the personalities and playing techniques of the pianists had been almost completely subsumed by the music. The music simply took over. At first a kind of passive object, it became the guiding force . . . As the night wore on we got weary, or rather just sleepy, and the beautiful state of suspension of self now became risky. Alertness had to be redoubled not to miss repetitions or notes. An element of comedy—now that solidarity and easiness were evidently there—joined us. The other thing I recall was the question of how Satie came to write this piece . . . Had he written it, and then decided why not do it 800 odd times over, or had he thought, if a piece were to be repeated so many times, what kind of a piece should it be, and then set out to write *Vexations*? We decided on the latter, because of the extraordinary durability of the music.⁶

Cage has expressed surprise that when the performance, which he had planned and talked about for a long time, finally took place, so many people 'who understood it, and sympathised and even agreed with the idea of playing something 840 times, didn't bother to show up'. He regrets their absence because 'if you came you saw the great difference between an idea and an experience'.⁷

The next important performance took place in England at the Arts Lab, Drury Lane, London, in October 1967. Apart from the Hames case, this was the first solo performance: it was given by Richard

Toop and lasted about 24 hours. Toop played the piece again a year later, also at the Arts Lab. A long time afterwards he expressed some anxiety about the great disparity in tempo between his versions and others, especially as he had not attempted to make his performance a long one.⁸ He was eventually reassured by reading Kostelanetz's book on Cage, in which Cage gives the duration of *Vexations* as 12 hours 10 minutes.⁹

Since my performance lasted about 24 hours, it seems to me that Cage and I agree on the pulsation of the music, but differ about the number of beats gathered within this pulse.

At the first performance, in 1967, Toop avoided the problem of counting up to 840 by using 840 numbered photocopies of the music. Apart from assembling the score, his preparation for the occasion consisted of trying the piece through a few times to establish the best tempo, from which he calculated the total duration. He never played the music for more than half an hour before the performance itself and stresses that he took the utmost care not to memorise it,

so that I should always have to make the effort to read each fresh sheet as it came up (even after the performance I was unable to play more than a few beats from memory).

This observation corresponds perfectly with the effect of the music on Christopher Hobbs and myself, which is something that frequently puzzles those who have not played the work. People expect, naturally, that if someone has played a short fragment of music over and over again for a very long period the least that can be expected is that he will know the piece by the end. When music is played from memory the player memorises the relation between sounds and the placement of his fingers on the keyboard. In *Vexations*, however, there is a curious gap between the music as it is notated and read and the sounds that are produced. On the few occasions when I looked at my hands while playing, the effect was startling: having become accustomed to reading a given note in a number of different notations (A as A, A natural, and B double flat; B flat as B flat and A sharp; D as D, D natural, and E double flat, etc.), I found it hard to reconcile the position of my fingers with the notational information.¹⁰

Toop goes on:

three things stand out in my mind from the first performance. Firstly, the piano was in the outer foyer, where there was an art exhibition, so that the music became a real 'musique d'ameublement'. People walked round the piano, talked, sometimes stopped and listened . . . Secondly, I remember a man from the 'Times' kneeling beside me as I played—it occurred to me at the time that not even Rubinstein got that sort of genuflectory treatment. The third aspect was less fortunate: after about 16 hours I asked for some kind of mild stimulant in addition to the strong coffee I had been getting (I was expecting some kind of vitamin pill); what actually materialised was another cup of coffee with (as I only discovered later) a whole phial of methedrine in it. The effect was hair-raising: my drooping eye-lids rolled up like in a Tom and Jerry cartoon (one of the newspaper reports remarked on my 'slightly glazed' appearance at the end of the performance). The trouble was that my field of vision became completely fixed: each time I got to the end of a page I had to lift my head up and realign my vision on to the beginning of the new page.

The second of Toop's performances at the Arts Lab took place in a small room adjoining the hall where he had played previously, and in a much quieter atmosphere, which he found less 'sympathetic'; it was also marred by distracting television lights, and cameramen who filmed at intervals. When the performance was over Toop played through the

piece once more for the benefit of the cameras so that he could be shown ending the piece and descending from the platform; but this take was not finally used in the film because his facial expression was considered by the BBC people to be 'insufficiently beatific'.

The period from 1967 to 1975 saw *Vexations* flourish. I take these outer dates from the performance by Richard Toop in October 1967 and that organised by Rob Worby at Bretton Hall College of Education in June 1975. The several versions given between these two range from the foolish enterprise of Hames at Sevenoaks (1971) and the equally foolish ones in Bangor, and Yankton, South Dakota (both 1969), to the very serious-minded undertakings in Leicester (1971), Stockholm (1972), and elsewhere. As the list shows, these performances varied considerably in their organisation, duration (though they fall roughly into two groups—those that lasted about 24 hours and those that lasted about 12-14), and in the different attitudes of the performers before the event. One thing is abundantly clear: those musicians who came from a broadly experimental musical background approached the work with great integrity, and those in whom this background was allied with an awareness of the fundamental importance of Satie's music as a whole found the piece a profoundly moving experience; in many cases it had far-reaching repercussions on the participants' work in other types of music.¹¹

Performances: 1958-75

This list makes no claim to completeness. Unless otherwise noted, all details have been supplied in private correspondence with the author by those involved in the performances concerned.

1958. Lewes Grammar School, Lewes, Sussex. *Pianist:* Richard Dave Hames (aged 13)

Hames tells me that he originally came into contact with *Vexations* and a number of other pieces by Satie through a visiting student teacher who was French. He remembers the teacher's name as Guy Rigault and he played the pieces from the Frenchman's handwritten copies.

September 1963. Pocket Theater, New York. *Organiser:* John Cage. *Pianists:* John Cage, David Tudor, Christian Wolff, Philip Corner, Viola Farber, Robert Wood, MacRae Cook, John Cale, David Del Tredici, James Tenney, Howard Klein (substitute), Joshua Rifkin (substitute). *Duration:* 18 hours 40 minutes

In this performance, and another organised by Cage in 1969 (see below, 21 November 1969), each performer sat on the stage for a period before he played a given number of repetitions; he then stayed to count the repetitions for the next pianist. See text for further details.

August 1966. Berlin. *Organiser:* John Cage. *Pianists:* six, including John Cage and Charlotte Moorman

During her second stint at the piano Moorman played naked from the waist upwards. It will be remembered that in the 1960s she attracted a certain notoriety as 'the topless cellist', especially in her collaborations with Nam June Paik. *The Guinness Book of Music Facts and Feats* says that Moorman performed *Vexations* in a semi-naked state because 'she loved nudity' and because Cage had bet her \$100 that she would not do it.

October 1967. Arts Lab, Drury Lane, London. *Pianist:* Richard Toop. *Duration:* c24 hours

See text for further details.

1968. Arts Lab, Drury Lane, London. *Pianist:* Richard Toop. *Duration:* c24 hours

See text for further details.

early 1969. Mount Marty College, Yankton, South Dakota. *Organiser:* Martin Berkofsky. *Pianists:* Martin Berkofsky, Carole Lambert, Florence Meier, Elizabeth Redder, Mrs Alice Hohenthaler, Sister Mary Patrick Logsdon. *Duration:* 5 hours 48 minutes

During the piece 'the performers laid a piece of plate glass on the grand piano strings and achieved a harpsichord effect . . . they did small interpretive dances as each new player interpreted the music . . . Sister Mary Patrick dramatically read excerpts from the life of Satie . . . those not playing pushed the piano around the stage forcing the current performer to keep up with it on foot: some rounds were played at breakneck speed, others were given fullysonorous treatment'.¹²

9-10 February 1969. The shop window of Crane and Son's music shop, Bangor, Wales. *Pianists:* ten students from University College of North Wales, Bangor.¹³ *Duration:* 21 hours

The performance was given on two pianos, played alternately; each pianist played 20 repetitions, which lasted 30 minutes. The students were organised into two groups of five and operated a shift system: 4.30 p.m. to 11.30 p.m., group 1; 11.30 p.m. to 6.30 a.m., group 2; 6.30 a.m. to 10. a.m., group 1; 10 a.m. to 1.30 pm., group 2. The first and 840th repetitions were played by Professor Reginald Smith Brindle, then professor of music at Bangor, who wore academic dress and performed 'rather individually'; the students dressed formally.

16-17 May 1969.¹⁴ Unger Lounge, George Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore. *Organiser:* Anthony Piccolo. *Pianists:* Anthony Piccolo, Ronald Roxbury, George Brown, William Bland, Ernest Ragogini, Sarah Meneely, Lois Rova, Kimberly Kabala, Jeff Connell, Patricia Sayre, Rick Minger, Jane Wanger, Fred Wanger, Paul Tardiff, Jeff Goldberg, Allan Sternfield, Uga Grants, Carolyn Smith, Juliet McComas, Lois Shapiro, David Holmes

Piccolo heard about the piece from Roxbury, and his piano teacher Dr Konrad Wolff 'had participated in a performance in Paris'. Piccolo was disturbed by what he knew of the performance in South Dakota (see above, early 1969)—Berkofsky had been a student at Peabody—and approached the work with great seriousness.

31 October 1969. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Pianist:* James Cuomo. *Duration:* 11 hours 7 minutes

21 November 1969. University of California at Davis. *Organiser:* John Cage. *Pianists:* twelve, including John Cage

Like the earlier performance organised by Cage in New York (see above, September 1963), this involved a strict procedure: each pianist was in the performance space for a period before he played, he then played a number of repetitions, and remained to keep count of the repetitions for the next pianist. The performance began at 6 a.m. and was preceded by 'twenty minutes of silent meditation' (the 'immobilités sérieuses' of Satie's text?).¹⁵

21-2 February 1970. Watters Gallery, Darlinghurst, Sydney. *Organiser:* David Ahern. *Pianists:* Peter Evans, Linda Wilson (substitute). *Duration:* 22 hours

Evans played continuously for 15 hours until he reached repetition 595, when he suddenly stopped; he was in a daze and left immediately. He writes: 'I would not play this piece again. I felt each repetition slowly wearing my mind away. I had to stop. If I hadn't stopped I'd be a very different person today . . . People who play it do so at their own great peril.'

Valerie Butler, a member of the audience, writes that Evans said 'he had to stop because his mind became full of evil thoughts, animals and "things" started peering out at him from the score.' Another pianist, Linda Wilson, came forward and completed the performance; she said that 'it didn't affect [her] at all and she could have kept on playing'. Valerie Butler felt that Wilson's taking over the performance was 'a travesty' and she did not stay for the last seven hours of the event. During the performance Christian Wolff's *Stones* (*Prose Collection*, 1968-9) and La Monte Young's String Trio (1958) were played with *Vexations*.¹⁶

1970. American Center, Paris. *Pianist:* Richard David Hames. *Duration:* 3 hours 12½ minutes (incomplete)

Hames writes that when he was a pupil of Nadia Boulanger in Paris he played *Vexations* as the last item in a programme of French music, having previously decided to finish when there was no audience left—'the latter had not been informed'. Clearly the piece was not completed; strictly, it was not even attempted.

Spring 1970. University of Maryland, Baltimore. *Organisers:* Professor Stewart Gordon, Professor Roy Hamlin Johnson

I have no information on the performance except the word of Patricia Friedman (who was not one of the players) that it was completed.

16 March 1971. Fletcher Hall, Leicester Polytechnic. *Event:* one of a series called 'The Invention of Problems' organised by Stroud Cornock. *Organiser:* Gavin Bryars. *Pianists:* Gavin Bryars, Christopher Hobbs. *Duration:* 14 hours 30 minutes

Only one piano was used in this performance, but the transitions between players were acoustically imperceptible. See text for further details.

June 1971. Leeds College of Music. *Event:* 1971 Leeds College of Music Festival. *Pianists:* Jeffrey Lewis, Barbara Winrow, others. *Duration:* 16 hours 30 minutes (incomplete)

Owing to regulations governing the use of the building in which the performance took place, the piece had to end at midnight, when 611 repetitions had been played. Barbara Winrow recalls 'the real sense of frustration which we felt' and the players' 'remarkable reluctance to stop' before they had reached 840 repetitions.

2 July 1971. Sevenoaks, Kent. *Event:* Sevenoaks Paean Festival. *Pianists:* Richard David Hames, 13 other pianists who were his pupils. *Duration:* 5 hours 3 minutes (incomplete)

Hames refers to this performance as an 'unscheduled happening', and certainly the event was not in any way premeditated or clearly considered. Hames and a group of his pupils decided 'on the spur of the moment' to play the complete piano works of Satie as part of what he calls a 'multi-media afternoon'. People were free to walk in and out as they pleased (this, of course, is a feature of most performances; there have been few, if any, where the audience has been obliged to attend the whole performance, though Racine's may be an exception to this). The 14 pianists played on seven pianos in various parts of the hall continuously from 2 p.m. to 7.03 p.m., at which time the young players had to return to their boarding houses to do their prep. Hames says that *Vexations* provided an 'interesting ostinato' to the event, perhaps implying that other things happened too (the rest of Satie's piano music?), and adds that 'an estimated 450 persons passed through and experienced the music without any reported ill effect'.

June 1972. Leeds. *Pianists:* Jeffrey Lewis, Barbara Winrow, others. *Duration:* 24 hours 30 minutes

This performance was a successful attempt to play the piece by the same people whose attempt in June 1971 (see

above) had been frustrated. This time the venue was a church, 'which made a better setting, both acoustically and aesthetically'. Each pianist played for much longer periods than in the earlier performance.

13-14 October 1972. Östgötagatan 33, Fylkingen, Stockholm. *Organiser:* Sten Hansen. *Pianists:* Ingrid Lindgren, Bengt Emil Johnson, Barbro Dahlman, Ake Erickson, László Horvath, Bengt Kulfors, Leo Nilson, Mats Persson, Katarina Ström. *Duration:* 24 hours 46 minutes

The nine pianists were divided into groups of three, each of which played for 4½ hours; every pianist played for 30 minutes and then rested for an hour, this cycle being repeated three times before the group changed. The first and last 30 minutes were broadcast live by Swedish Radio, and both the country's television channels transmitted short glimpses of the work during news bulletins. The audience totalled between 1200 and 1500 people, and there were never fewer than five in the room. Sten Hansen told me that one man stayed for 19 hours. 'He had never been to a concert before and had told his wife that he was going to look in for some minutes at nine in the evening. He stayed until his wife, very worried, came for him in the afternoon of the next day. He told me that he would have stayed for all the 25 hours, but his wife had arranged something very important.'

1974. Dartington College of Arts, Dartington, Devon. *Event:* a contemporary music seminar. *Organiser:* Richard David Hames. *Duration:* 24 hours. *Pianists:* eight, including Richard David Hames

The performance took place in the dance school at the college and Mary Fulkerson organised a group of her students to dance for the whole duration of the piece.

11-12 May 1974. Holywell Music Room, Oxford. *Organiser:* Simon Thorne. *Pianists:* John Wesley Barker, Simon Best, John Edwards, Paul Feldwich, Pete Mason, Glyn Perrin, Camilla Saunders, Alden Schwarz, Simon Thorne. *Duration:* 23 hours 56 minutes

Each pianist played 20 repetitions after having counted through the previous set of repetitions, and the group played in rotation. Each repetition had been calculated at 1 minute 44 seconds, and each set at 34 minutes 40 seconds.

22-3 May 1974. Fiatal Műveszek Klubja (Young Artists' Club), Budapest. *Organisers:* Új Zenei Studio (New Music Studio). *Pianists:* Barnabás Dukay, Zoltán Jeney, Zoltán Kocsis, Katalin Komlos, László Sáry, András Schiff, László Vidovszky, András Wilhelmi. *Duration:* 23 hours

26 September 1974. Concert hall of the Fryderyk Chopin Society, Warsaw. *Event:* 1974 Warsaw Autumn. *Organiser:* Reinbert de Leeuw. *Pianists:* Reinbert de Leeuw, Jerzy Marchwinski, Krzysztof Slowinski, Jerzy Witkowski, Szabolcs Eszteny, Stephen Montague, one or two others. *Duration:* c12 hours

Stephen Montague and the other unnamed pianists joined the team after the printed programme had been issued.

1 June 1975. Bretton Hall College of Education, near Wakefield, Yorkshire. *Organiser:* Rob Worby. *Pianists:* a team of students from the college

Racine's performances: 1978-9

The Canadian musician Robert Racine has given several performances of *Vexations* and has identified himself very closely with it. Therefore, although the main body of performances dealt with here covers only the period up to 1975, I include details of

Racine's unique involvement with the work.¹⁷

Racine first came across *Vexations* at a dance performance by Martha Clark in Montreal in February 1977 (see 'Miscellany', below). Two months later he found the music in Anne Rey's book on Satie and read her account of the work. As a result of this and, more important, of his opposition to Cage's suggestion (admittedly made before he had played the piece) that 'one could not endure a performance of *Vexations* . . . but why give it a thought?', Racine resolved to perform it himself.¹⁸

4 November 1978. Gallerie Véhicule Art, Montreal.
Duration: 14 hours 8 minutes

The event was recorded on 16 colour video cassettes by Vincent Dostaler. For this performance Racine copied the score 840 times (he does not say so, but given his rigour in these matters it could well have been by hand)¹⁹ and, in addition, produced another 840 sheets each bearing the numbers 1 to 152 (the number of written notes in the score, though only 144 actually sound), which served as mural decoration. His only other preparation was to abstain from liquids from the evening before the performance in order not to have to interrupt the 840 repetitions by visiting the lavatory; he has done the same on every other occasion on which he has played the work. In the event, he was unhappy with this first performance, partly because he made 30 or so errors, each of which caused him to pause for about two seconds, and partly because applause killed the last notes of the piece.

15 December 1978. Private house, Arthabaska.
Duration: 17 hours 53 minutes (including the whole of *Pages mystiques*)²⁰

A female member of the audience at Racine's first performance, who had heard the whole of the piece, requested this performance to which she listened alone. Racine played all three works published by Éditions Max Eschig as *Pages mystiques*, so the duration given above is about two or three minutes longer than that of *Vexations* itself.

13 January 1979. Music Gallery, Toronto. Duration: 19 hours

The longer duration of the work on this occasion resulted from Racine's stricter interpretation of the words 'Très lent' at the head of Satie's score. For this version he used an interesting method of counting in order to control all the aspects of the performance himself: into a small box 20 × 20 cm he stuck 21 rows of 40 needles; these were sunk half way into the box, and as he played each motif he sank one needle completely.

On 7 April 1979 Racine gave a lecture on *Vexations* at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montreal, which drew on an extended essay that he has worked on since 1978. In almost every respect I find his approach admirable. I would take issue with him only over his fulminations against 'team' performances; while the list given above shows that there have been some disastrous attempts at the work, it is not the use of more than one pianist that has made them so. Racine's claim that the phrase 'se préparer' in Satie's rubric indicates a solo pianist is unfounded since 'se' can be either singular or plural. Nor do I agree with his interpretation of 'se jouer' as implying the need for a large audience; it could equally well apply to a performance for the player(s) alone (not yet done, to my knowledge). The need for a large audience seems to have generated Racine's aim to play *Vexations* in 840 different places for the largest possible number of people.

Miscellany: 1970-77

On 1 October 1970 Stephen Smoliar recorded a tape piece called *Cambridge Memories: a Programming*

Offering using the PDP 6 computer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. Dr Smoliar describes the piece as being 'in three movements with two interludes and an epilogue. *Vexations* is the spinal cord of the entire composition, while Bach's *Musical Offering* is the primary source of flesh.' This computer version of *Vexations* as part of a musical collage involved the use of EUTERPE, a programming language designed 'for the modelling of musical structures'; see his *A Parallel Processing Model of Musical Structures* (PhD, M.I.T., 1971), p.54.

On 27 September 1975 Claude Coppens gave a recital of piano music by Satie at the Villa Olmo, Lake Como. A tape loop of *Vexations* was played before and after the concert and in the interval.

On 2 February 1977 at the Salle Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, Montreal, the Pilobolus Dance Theatre presented a 'pas de deux' called *The Four Thursdays*, in which Martha Clark danced with a chair; *Vexations* was used to accompany the dance, which lasted six or seven minutes.

The *Vexations* motif is played once through on the sixth disc in Aldo Ciccolini's set of recordings of Satie's piano works (EMI); the performance is notable for the inclusion of a wrong note.

Notes written by Bryars and Hobbs during 'Vexations'

For me the most interesting document concerning the relationship between Satie's *Vexations* and its performers (and, by implication, between Satie's work as a whole and its performers) is the one that generated my enquiry—namely the correspondence that developed between Christopher Hobbs and me while we were playing the work at Leicester in 1971. The tone is informal since our notes constitute the private, muted conversation of two friends during a sustained period of highly concentrated activity. Since each group of remarks made by one player could be answered only when the other ceased to play, the time-scale of the exchanges is almost the same as that of the piece itself. In fact, however, the opening period is not reflected in the 'conversation' for I wrote my first note only towards the end of Christopher's first session at the piano—I had begun playing nearly two-and-a-half hours before he arrived since I had been able to sleep in the college, while he had had to stay with a friend. In the later stages of the performance we played for more or less equal lengths of time, or at least we played approximately equal numbers of repetitions. The last sentence of the document was written while I was playing for the last time but about ten minutes before I finally stopped.

GAVIN BRYARS: I mark the paper at the end of the piece. Do you? If not, don't forget to allow for this in counting (otherwise we may count one phrase twice). Reply below.

CHRISTOPHER HOBBS: I mark at the beginning, and I'll watch out. Sundry remarks: how easy it is to be distracted; maybe the piece is about errors (little whirlpools out in the middle of the ocean);²¹ a guy from Radio Leicester wants to interview us this afternoon.

GB: When I started at 7 a.m. the only audience for the first 80 minutes was the caretaker who (perfectly) carried on sweeping the floor. I found after an hour or so that I begin to imagine things (I was expecting your

arrival?) and I kept being certain that someone had been standing behind me. I later found out that it was due to my being so conscious of the music that I forgot that I also make sounds! (Coat collar on back of neck—hence someone behind.)²² Later I found that the opposite was the case i.e. I heard more other things than the piano. One of the students is going to film us (single frame every so often) O.K.? (C.H. Fine). Remember the Cage thing about Indian music 'sobering the mind and rendering it susceptible to divine influence'?²³

CH: My imaginings are restricted to the piano sounds themselves (sometimes a chord sounds completely wrong—the last crotchet chord in the piece always does; and the C at the start sounds very sharp, after the preceding chord. When I make a mistake it's like the end of the world. The music's unnerving because it's impossible to get used to it—the unexpected keeps happening. Why not use these remarks as the basis for the radio interview?

GB: Fine—we simply give them these sheets (and maybe read out the parts we have each written—like the Radio 4 Saturday Night Theatre). It's like you say—the end of the world—like falling asleep while you're driving along the motorway. I nearly fell off my chair with fright when C above middle C (B sharp rather) started to stick. I find I've developed a sequence of finishing the piece—marking the paper—starting the piece and lifting up the B sharp while I play with left hand only and shake my right leg that goes to sleep through pedalling. Apparently Philip Corner said that none of the performers at the 1963 performance emerged unchanged by playing the piece. Don't you find the notation as mystifying as the way the piece is constantly surprising! Apart from B sharps etc. I mean maybe it's just that the sharp signs seem like arrows connecting two notes (and hence the feeling of unnerving since you're never sure that you're playing (or about to play) the right notes). Also I keep seeing flats as sixes and double flats and double sharps start to get very blurred.²⁴

CH: Yes, the notation is really weird. Especially on the 4th system—there are two chords which are the same notes, and occur within a quaver or so of each other. I can't remember what they are, but they're notated completely differently (e.g. F sharp and C flat the first time, G flat and B the second) the effect is of the notation bending the pitch of the notes I have to keep telling myself that if I play the chords with the same fingering they really will sound all right! There's a strong temptation to use a different fingering for each differently-notated identical note. When I went into the canteen, someone had the Daily Telegraph. I glanced at it over his shoulder, and was surprised that there was nothing about 'Vexations' on the first page! I honestly expected to see it. Leaving the room is a nerve-wracking experience, don't you find? Any slight change in the way you listen to the notes is frightening. At one point I suddenly began listening to the bass line when it was in combination with the other parts in the same way that I had when it was on its own. It was shocking; I nearly stopped. It's the same feeling Frankenstein must have had. Suddenly you realise you're not doing what you thought you were at all. I wonder that Satie wrote it (due, no doubt, to experience of his other music). I wonder if the piece would change so much if you were just listening and had never seen the music? Perhaps a listener's reaction would be of interest ('Yes, it's very interesting, the way that . . .') whereas we're using words like 'shocking', 'unnerving' and so on.

GB: Yes I know what you mean about leaving the room. I went to get some fresh air a while ago and I

found I was walking extremely slowly and not focussing at all. I was simply looking rather blankly. It's an extraordinary intrusion when someone speaks to you (that's not quite right—I probably mean that I feel very much not an integral part of the conversation). When I'd been out for a while I found that it took quite a lot of listening to get really into the piece (although I was convinced that I remembered it very clearly). I found this piece of paper where someone had been trying to notate the numbers of the notes (rhythmically, or rather, sequentially). It's nice that it goes back to notation. The pitch-graphs are very nice.²⁵

CH: Yes I like the dot and dash rhythmic notation—especially the way the last note in a phrase is a dash. The form I'd expect would have been

. . . — . . . — . . . — . . . — (or .)

i.e. the person hasn't notated how the notes feel. I've a fear that my playing may be getting automatic. What it needs is a bad error (like playing the same phrase twice over—something of which I'm constantly in dread—also of forgetting it's the 2nd or 4th system that I've just played). Wonder when, and if, this interview is happening?

GB: I don't worry so much about becoming mechanical—I find that if the notation were to be taken away I couldn't play it! At least not the 2nd and 4th systems. There was quite a startling bit in my last section where the bass suddenly sounded very clear even though, acoustically, it was probably a good deal softer than the upper parts. An Indian student just told me that when he was *listening* (over a ½ hour period) it seemed to grow louder and louder! But if he relaxed—it sounded like the traffic outside.

CH: The guy from BBC Leicester said it got deafening as he listened. I haven't noticed it though. I talked to him for 2½ minutes for an early-morning programme—intentionally fatuous questions (why 840? Is it boring? etc.) to which I gave as honest answer as I could: but as you say it's really difficult to involve yourself in conversation. It's interesting that this (letter) form of communication works. I think perhaps it's not so much not wanting to be spoken to as not wanting to speak (i.e. make sounds other than the music). The radio guy may come back tomorrow and talk to us both together—perhaps then we could read out these sheets. He thought it was rather heavy stuff for the early morning—not that what I said to him was less heavy. He was surprised that we were still using the score. Obviously it's not just the notes (though I couldn't even play the bass line without the music) it's the risk of getting lost. The score's like a lifeline.

GB: I know what you mean about conversation—I feel like going about as softly as I possibly can—and as slowly. I think the writing works for a number of complex reasons—but mainly because we don't want to become involved in non-intentional (i.e. non-Satie) sounds. Doesn't mean that we're not able to hear anything else—quite the opposite. I had a similar experience about the 840—I mumbled something about not knowing and that you've 'got to draw the line somewhere.' (Reminds me of Michael Bentine's '50 Years on the Street' where he talks about Paris on December 31st 1889—the night before the 'gay 90's'—and everything is very boring, drab etc.—someone asks for a second cup of tea and is accused of being gluttonous and when asked about how many sugars says 'one would be scrimping—3 would be an indulgence'.) Cf. 839 and 841!!

CH: Both these replies seem very characteristic of Howard Skempton—he could say them and they'd sound quite natural. My reply was that our act of faith in the composer which had led us to embark on the piece extended also to the composer's instructions. I was going to remark last time but didn't that I found myself talking very softly to the interviewer—you're absolutely right! 839 and 841 simply don't look right. Actually I'm sure we made errors in the counting, but I don't feel that it matters, since it's unintentional. Cold-bloodedly omitting the last repetition or adding one extra, is like Richard Toop repeating the end for TV; belying the composer's trust in you.²⁶

GB: Right—we're not going to have a recount, that would imply that we were only talking about number. I find now that I hear the last note of the bass part (the E in systems 1 and 3) as an interval with the previous C flat. I'm worried about silly things like whether I might start rushing, or slowing, or fading, or changing key—all of which would be empirically impossible: though the modulation feeling is there all the time—with hearing the C flat held through the E the next chord seems like a radical 'key' change. The second chord in systems 2 and 4 seems to have a radical structure—being the only chord that doesn't have a tritone in it and sounds very strange indeed. It never fails to amaze me how you can count the repetitions as well as mark them on the sheet (like the way your marks are more neatly ordered than mine). I give quite a nervous dash at the paper either on the first B flat or between the B flat and D sharp thus crotchet B flat to crotchet D sharp with the penstroke on the quaver between! Early in the day I once wrote 2 marks because they fell on the first two quavers (I marked early)—so I had to leave the next repetition unmarked.

CH: The chord that I find most amazing is still the penultimate one in systems 2 and 4—possibly because of the minor 9th relation with the previous chord (a high B sharp to a lower C flat—this notation!).²⁷ The general downward movement by semitones of the bass also hits me from time to time, and it becomes very difficult not to emphasise those notes. I'm not sure that you will be last to play. If we go on in 30's the sequence is:—me to 765, you to 795, me to 825 . . . oh yes, so you do. Rather you than me. The urge to hold the last chord through another quaver or so will be quite great I think. Perhaps the easiest thing would be if I keep count in your last session, and when you get to 839 I'll hand you a piece of paper, or write 839 in the book—if I give it to you on 840, you'll immediately start making mistakes, if you're anything like me. Yeah, counting the dashes is difficult (not to say pointless). But there you are. I always have to make a mark as I play a note—usually the first B flat. The key-feel of the first few chords in systems 2 and 4 sometimes seems very clear—then it all blurs again. Likewise the bass—sometimes it's a very gentle melody, but once or twice it's sounded like a Nono first violin part. I think we'll end around 9.30, which is what we expected. I just can't remember this morning's speed (early morning, that is). It must have been very slow, to take us so long to get to 400.

GB: It looks as though I will be last—the best thing is if you keep count of my dashes (I'll still make them) and at 840th repetition you stand at side as though you were going to take over (less dramatic than a tap on the shoulder!!) I agree that penultimate chord is unbelievable; around that seems easiest for mistakes—the chord being unexpected. My earliest speed was 71 for the first 95 minutes!! I told the caretaker just now that it will be around 9.30 and so he's going to stay on, which is rather nice since he was the one who

let me in and he's been in and out all day. I'll play the last quaver absolutely strictly. Apart from Bill Hughes (the caretaker)—our longest listener has been Andrew Miles, a 3rd year sculptor, who's been here most of the day on and off. One of the staff, Peter Kelly, stayed for about 5 hours this morning and said that it was one of the loveliest pieces he'd ever heard. Apparently the hall clock was stopped at 11.40 earlier today (which is why we had no idea of the time of day earlier) and that while you were playing (about 10.30) it suddenly went right round to the correct time!

CH: It was while you were playing; the effect was very metaphorical!!

¹ Patrick Gowers, 'Satie's Rose Croix Music (1891-5)', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, vol.92 (1965-6), p.1.

² Letter dated 14 October 1974.

³ The issue of *Contrepoinsts* containing the first publication of *Vexations* also includes an article by Cage, but he makes no reference to the work.

⁴ 'Erik Satie' was reprinted, though without *Vexations*, in John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), pp.76-82.

⁵ *Silence*, p.78.

⁶ Letter dated 10 September 1974.

⁷ Interview with Michael Nyman, June 1976 (unpublished).

⁸ 'I just couldn't envisage the music at any other speed' (letter dated 14 April 1972). Toop's second performance was perfectly consistent with his first.

⁹ John Cage, 'More Satie', *Musical America*, no.71 (1 April 1951), p.26 [letter to the editor]; reprinted in John Cage, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp.92-4.

¹⁰ This use of as many ways as possible of describing the same note might almost be thought of in terms of the various ways of depicting a three-dimensional object—by means of plan, front elevation, and side elevation. Commentators have occasionally described the three *Gymnopédies* in terms of three different views of the same state of affairs, and Satie characteristically gives a number of viewpoints for the drawings of the 'projet pour un buste de M. Erik Satie'. The activity of the performer's mind in switching from one mode of description to another for successive occurrences of the same event extends these multiple modes so that a level of privacy—that of the performer's mental acts—becomes an integral facet of the piece. The short texts in Satie's later piano works offer a further exploration of the direct dialogue between Satie and his interpreter, to which the listener cannot be privy. It is worth recalling that in the score of *Heures séculaires et instantanées* (June-July 1914) Satie wrote 'I prohibit any person to read the texts aloud during the period of musical performance. Every infringement will arouse my just indignation against the culprit. He will be granted no mercy.'

¹¹ 'Satie's music is handled with great sympathy by experimental musicians, Webern's music was brutally appropriated by the avant-garde.' Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), p.33.

¹² [Irving] Fine, 'Satie Applauded: a Happening in South Dakota', *Clavier*, vol.8, no.3 (1969), p.34.

¹³ The list of pianists was given in the *North Wales Chronicle*, 13 February 1969.

¹⁴ The attentive reader will note that this performance was completed on Satie's birthday.

¹⁵ An account of this performance and the projects that Cage carried out at Davis are given in John Dinwiddie, 'Mewanemooseicday: John Cage in Davis 1969', *Source*, no.7 (1970), pp.21-6.

¹⁶ The idea for this form of collage probably came from a concert at the Round House, London, on 4 May 1969. Cage's *Atlas eclipticalis* was played by four percussionists (Tom Phillips, Christopher Hobbs, John Tilbury, and myself) for seven hours, during which a sequence of other compositions was also played: Cornelius Cardew, *The Great Digest, Paragraph 2*; Christian Wolff, *Stones*; Christopher Hobbs, *Voicepiece*; Howard Skempton, *Scumbling*; Eddie Prévost, *Silver Pyramid*; La Monte Young, *String Trio*; Terry Jennings, *String Quartet*; George Brecht, *Candle Piece for Radio*. David Ahern, the organiser of the Australian performance of *Vexations*, played in both Jennings's Quartet and Young's Trio. The latter was particularly effective in the setting of a very sparse and distant accompaniment of *Atlas eclipticalis*, which was played from four parts of the upper gallery.

¹⁷ Racine gives an account of his work on *Vexations* in *Parachute*, no.17 (1979), pp.50-53.

¹⁸ Racine later learned of two Canadian performances that had preceded his own. The first, in 1975 at York University, Toronto, used a team of six pianists and lasted twelve hours; but since the performers, curiously, decided to play only the two harmonisations and not the entire motif, this was only half a performance and not a valid one. The second was given in Ottawa by a team of pianists organised by Ramon Pelinsky, a member of the music faculty at the University of Montreal; it lasted about 14 hours.

¹⁹ Racine undertook, too, to copy the whole of Flaubert's works by hand. The reasons for this are obscure. He may be a latter-day Pierre Menard, the Borges character who wrote *Don Quixote* a second time, or he may be taking an unusual path towards completing *Bouvard et Pecuchet*, or there may be some other explanation.

²⁰ The collection *Pages mystiques* consists of *Prière*, *Vexations*, and *Harmonies*.

²¹ The reference is to La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 no.15*.

²² During the first period of the performance I kept my overcoat on with the collar turned up.

²³ For example, in '45' for a Speaker', *Silence*, p.158: 'Years ago I asked myself "Why do I write music?" An Indian musician told me the traditional answer in India was "To sober the mind and thus make it susceptible to divine influences." Same answer is given by some old English composer.'

²⁴ It is curious that, in the middle of the performance, I was under the impression that there are double sharps in the notation—there are, in fact, none.

²⁵ A member of the audience tried to take down the elements of the piece (not the pitches); his listing began

1234(5)
12345(6)
12345(6)(6)

²⁶ See the section above on Richard Toop's performances. I sent these notes to Richard shortly after we had played *Vexations*. He said: 'The "polemic" doesn't worry me at all; we always have to find some impurity in our predecessors in order to find faith in our own activity (this goes for me just as much as for anyone else: I took a lot of strength from the "impurity" of Cage's team performances, which was very important to me at the time, though naturally it seems trivial now). Actually I have only the dimmest memories of what happened at the end of either of my performances, though I remember being pestered by the media after both. What I do recollect about the ending of the second performance is that the extra rendering for the cameras was disjunct in time from the rest of the performance, i.e. there was a performance of 840 pages followed at some distance by a 1-page "farce d'atelier" for the T.V. men.'

²⁷ There are only two chords in the piece that are not diminished: the second chord in each system—an augmented triad (A, C sharp, F)—and the sixth chord from the end—an augmented 6th chord, or a dominant 7th spelled differently (F, A, D sharp).

Dave Smith

Music in Albania

It is unlikely that many readers will know much about Albania, one of only a handful of countries with which Britain has no diplomatic relations. The sporadic reports on Albanian affairs that appear in our media are often remarkable for the degree of their inaccuracy as well as their thinly disguised hostility. And yet the unique nature of the country is immediately apparent to any visitor—it is, after all, a largely self-sufficient society without unemployment, taxes, or inflation (prices were reduced in June 1982). Contrary to popular belief, it is easy to visit Albania, as I did in August 1982, though the only way to do so is by going on a package holiday.¹

As far as music is concerned, the wealth and variety is astonishing, considering that Albania is a country of just over 2½ million people inhabiting an area slightly larger (and more mountainous) than Wales. Singing appears to be a national sport even more popular than football—scarcely surprising, perhaps, since a visit to a kindergarten revealed that even young children are able to perform songs and recite poetry with both a remarkable confidence and a surprising lack of self-consciousness.

The three- to five-piece bands that play in bars, restaurants, and hotels (there are no juke-boxes) often include a virtuoso instrumentalist, usually a clarinettist or a violinist: technical dexterity, full-blooded tone quality, intricate ornamentation, and frequent *glissandi* (and sometimes bewildering rhythmic groupings), all contribute to the cheerful, rhapsodic nature of their performance. This sort of band, known as a *sazé*, also includes instruments such as piano accordion, guitar (possibly electric), and drum-kit, and is typical of urban popular music, forms of which developed during the 500-year Turkish occupation. Despite certain oriental features, it sounds just as peculiarly Albanian (rather than all-purpose Balkan) as the strikingly different rural folk music. This itself displays considerable regional differences, particularly the vocal music, which tends towards a hard-edged, nasal homophony in the north and a complex, drone-based, ancient-sounding polyphony in the south, where probably more types of part-singing have developed than in any other region of Europe. Instrumental folk ensembles frequently feature long-necked lutes and shepherds' pipes. Lutes often accompany songs, but instruments such as pipes (*fyell* and *kavall*) and the small double clarinet (*zumare*) can sometimes be heard to best advantage when they are played alone;² customarily employing circular breathing, soloists on these instruments improvise 'pieces' based on frequent and varied repetition of simple motifs. A counterpart in urban music (and one of its highlights) is the *kaba*, 'an instrumental improvisation of vast territorial extent . . . as with the Blues in the USA, every performance of the *kaba* is achingly familiar yet always fresh and different'.³ Bands that are used to performing for tourists will often play Western tunes as well, complete with Albanian-style expression and ornamentation; they seem to have a peculiar affinity for tangos and soulful popular numbers—*Petite Fleur* and *House of the Rising Sun* are particular favourites.

Albanian folk music, then, is a strong cultural force which is very much alive and well. The folk music

archive of the Institute of People's Culture in Tirana holds about 21,000 folk melodies. 'This may seem a large collection', the assistant director told me, 'but it is small in comparison to what we must have.' There are frequent national and regional contests and festivals, of which the most celebrated is the National Folklore Festival, held in Gjirokastra, a picturesque city in the south renowned for its unique architecture. This festival is held every five years, most recently in October 1978.

Thanks to the pioneering work of the late A. L. Lloyd, Albanian folk music is not completely unknown in Britain. But what of the music produced by Albanian composers? John Jansson's performance of Česk Zadeja's Toccata at the Albanian Society's memorial meeting for A. L. Lloyd in January was possibly the first British performance of any Albanian composition. But however little known these composers may be to the rest of the world, they seem well publicised and widely appreciated within their own country. Armed with a radio-cassette machine and a daily newspaper, I was able to record a fairly representative sample of orchestral, choral, and operatic music, though solo piano and chamber music proved more difficult to locate.

A general guide-book informed me that 'Albanian composers base themselves on the folklore of the country and avoid "abstract and decadent" trends. Their aesthetic aim is national in form and socialist in substance as the basic principles of socialist realism'.⁴ I expected to hear music that was heavily dependent on nationalist composers of the 19th and early 20th centuries and Soviet socialist realist composers of the Stalin era. These expectations were fuelled by the knowledge that the conditions created by the Turkish occupation, the ravages of two world wars, and the inter-war repressive dictatorship of King Zog made it impossible for composers to flourish. In the immediate post-war years, they virtually had to start from scratch. Consequently the first Albanian operetta (*Agimi* (Dawn) by Kristo Kono) appeared as late as 1953, the first opera (*Mrika* by Preng Jakova) in 1958 and the first ballet (*Halili dhe Hajrija* (Halil and Hajrija) by Tish Daia) in 1963.

My first reactions to much of what I heard were mixed. Many pieces were attractively tuneful, spirited, and cheerful, and all were tonal (in the broadest sense). But often I was left feeling rather bewildered by what seemed to be a strange attitude to harmonic progression, or a rate of change of ideas considerably faster than, say, Poulenc's—Sokol Shupo's Rhapsody for piano and orchestra was a particularly inscrutable example. Perhaps the most disorientating thing was that it was often difficult to relate these works to Western models: I heard only one piece (Lorenç Antoni's *Pjesë pér malesorjét* (Piece for highlanders)) that could be accused of a particularly strong indebtedness (to Dvořák); the expected whiffs of Bartók and Prokofiev were rare, though a vaguely Russian-sounding orchestral palette was in evidence at times.

The main radio station, Radio Tirana, often presents programmes consisting entirely of rhapsodies, symphonic poems, suites, ballet music, or even overtures. One composer whose music was broadcast frequently and instantly appealed to me was Aleksandër Peçi (b. 1951). The attractive Rhapsody for violin and orchestra (1977) is typical. Subtitled 'Valle e jone, valle e popullit' (Our dance, dance of the people), it reflects the composer's contact with the folk music of the south, particularly that of Përmet, a town near the Greek border, whose music is noted for its lyrical warmth and lively character. Peçi's Rhapsody contrasts these two types of material—he

introduces an authentic lyrical folk-tune at one point —before launching into a brief but astonishing cadenza, related to the particular variety of *kaba* found in Përmet and featuring a stylised 'wailing' figure and retuning of the violin's G string.

This is a good example of a work that openly displays its folk music connections without sounding like a sophisticated arrangement. While it is unmistakably of the 20th century, it is light years away from, say, Bartók or Enescu, being pretty consonant and full of typically Romantic gestures. The clarity and immediate attractiveness reappeared in other works by Peçi for solo instrument and orchestra, particularly the Cello Fantasia (1979). The Variations for horn (1975) is a less memorable piece (I've never heard a horn player use so much vibrato), but the Suite for piano and orchestra entitled 'Kuadro heroizmit' (Pictures of heroism) is more dissonant and highly charged and contains flourishes reminiscent of Prokofiev. *Pjesë pér flaut* (Piece for flute; accompanied by an almost Latin-American-sounding folk orchestra) is unashamedly 'light' in character and reflects the fact that Peçi, like most other Albanian composers, is equally at ease writing film music, a stirring revolutionary song, an orchestral piece, or even 'light music'.⁵

Not all composers make such clear references to folk music as Peçi. Several seem to favour highly impassioned minor-key tensions, which are effective in disguising folk sources, or so it would appear. One piece that uses such techniques is Rhapsody no.1 for orchestra (1973) by Feim Ibrahim (b. 1937); a useful little book on Albanian composers, which I managed to pick up, assured me that this work 'directly evokes authentic folk rhapsodies'.⁶ Much as I admired the work for its emotional drama and struggle, I couldn't detect a very strong folk connection. Most Western listeners, I imagine, would happily sit through the symphonic poems *Atdheu* (Motherland; 1974) by Shpëtim Kushta (b. 1946) and *Borova* by Thoma Gaqi (b. 1948) without being aware of any folk reference whatsoever. Solemnity and epic-heroics permeate the first of these, while *Borova* (named after a village whose inhabitants were massacred by the Nazis) is suitably imbued with tragedy and a reflection upon the courage of the people who struggled against the invaders.

The orchestration of these symphonic poems is predominantly dark-coloured, a feature common to much Albanian music. Peçi's music is more transparently textured than most, but that of Tish Daia (b. 1926) is the most individual sounding. Daia's Rhapsody for flute and orchestra (1981) is a short but effective essay in highly ornamented, lyrical-pastoral, low-register flute writing, which passes quickly and effortlessly into impassioned orchestral tuttis. The string writing is particularly imaginative, ranging from beefy arpeggio figures (reminiscent of Janaček) in the tuttis to quiet glassy-textured accompaniment in the early stages of the work. Effective string writing is also a feature of an excerpt I heard from a much earlier work, the ballet *Halili dhe Hajrija* (1961-2). The events portrayed in this the first Albanian ballet occurred in the 18th century, when Turkish oppression encountered the resistance of the highland warriors. Musically the piece furnishes further evidence of Daia's ability to cope with rapid contrast without creating the feeling that the composer is presenting too much information—in fact Daia's ideas seem to flow at a more relaxed rate than those of most of his compatriots.

Halili dhe Hajrija was performed 150 times between 1963 and 1973, which is some measure of its popularity. Encouraged by its success, several other

ballets appeared in the 1960s, such as *Delina* by Çesk Zadeja (b. 1927), *Fatozi partizan* (The brave partisan) by Kosma Laro, and *Cuca e maleve* (The girl from the mountains) by Nikolla Zoraqi (b. 1929). Tableau 2 of Act 2 of Zoraqi's ballet (which was one of the most impressive things I heard during my stay) seems to indicate that the composer's forte is the broadly lyrical and the feverishly passionate; the extraordinarily jolly *Uvertura festivalit* (1969) is barely recognisable as a work by the same composer. I also managed to buy a piano reduction of Zoraqi's Third Violin Concerto, which looks fiendishly difficult, but, judging by Ibrahim Mali's dazzling performance of Peçi's Rhapsody, there are violinists able to cope with it.

One of the most prolific composers appears to be Tonin Harapi (b. 1928), whose work seems fairly diatonic in comparison with that of most of his countrymen. His vocal suite *Vullnatarët* (The volunteers; 1965) is dedicated to the youth of the country, whose voluntary work on such projects as the construction of the railways is well known; it is a cheerful and energetic three-movement choral piece, which pays tribute to this topical phenomenon. Harapi seems less attracted to the kind of impassioned utterance common in the works of Ibrahimni, Zoraqi, and Kushta, even in dramatic works such as his opera *Zgjimi* (1974). His relatively lightweight Second Rhapsody for piano and orchestra (a work that makes obvious allusions to folk music) seems to bear this out.

I should have liked to hear more of the operatic achievements of Albania's senior composers Preng Jakova (1919-69) and Kristo Kono (b. 1907), both of whom are accredited People's Artists (the others are Tish Daia, Çesk Zadeja, and Avni Mula—several more are Artists of Merit). Kono's opera *Lulja e kujtimit* (Flowers of remembrance; 1958) has a marvellously rousing martial finale, which sounds like the result of a collaboration between Verdi and Eisler.

I was disappointed in the small piano pieces I occasionally came across. The brief Toccata of Çesk Zadeja seems less effective in terms of the piano than does his Symphonic Suite in terms of the orchestra. The toccata-type piece, often involving fast semi-quavers in alternate hands, is a popular choice since there is a natural counterpart in the fast virtuoso playing of the *çifeli*, a two-string lute.

The position of Albania in the world of composition is a quite peculiar one. Here is a body of music in which the element of communication is of paramount importance. Quite frankly it was refreshing to hear a large amount of recently composed tonal music, little of which struck me as being trite or ill considered. Composers have flourished for barely 40 years in Albania and yet their music ignores almost all the fashionable tendencies in Western music from Schoenberg and Stravinsky onwards (though Albanian higher musical education includes study of such phenomena). Their reasons for this lie in a popular political stance, which maintains that

the efforts of the present-day reactionary aesthetes to advertise a 'universal' art serve the interest of the imperialist bourgeoisie which has always striven to denigrate or to eliminate the cultural traditions of smaller nations and the national spirit in art and culture, to facilitate its cultural aggression and the subjugation of nations... starting from impressionism and expressionism [and continuing] to the present dodecaphonic, serial, punctualistic music... they all try to justify themselves under the cloak of 'innovation', the 'search for the new' at all costs, while breaking down every connection with the best progressive traditions of the peoples and, above all, seeking to divert attention from the

essential problems of the content, from the major questions that are concerning mankind today, the working class, the youth, the peoples of the world, who are fighting for their liberation and their social rights.⁷

- ¹ The only British travel company that arranges visits to Albania is Regent Holidays of 13 Small Street, Bristol.
- ² A record that features solos from different instruments is *Folklore instrumental albanais* (Vendemiaire VDE 114, AD 37). Two other available records that I can recommend are *L'Albanie folklorique* (Disques Cellie 010) and *Folk Music of Albania*, collected and edited by A. L. Lloyd (TOPIC 12T 154).
- ³ A. L. Lloyd, sleeve notes to *Folk Music of Albania*.
- ⁴ *An Outline of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania* (n.p.: New Albania, 1976), p.62.
- ⁵ 'Light music', which sometimes features rock-style syncopation or drumming, is perhaps the nearest Albanian equivalent to pop music; it is nevertheless easy to relate to folk music, at times so much so that it is difficult to detect where one stops and the other begins.
- ⁶ Spiro Kalemi, *Arritjet e artit tonë muzikor* [Achievements of our musical art] (Tirana, 1982), p.152.
- ⁷ Simon Gjoni, 'The Modernist Distortions in Contemporary Bourgeois-revisionist Music', *Albania Today* (1977), no.1 pp.48-52.

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Roger Heaton

Horatiu Radulescu, 'Sound Plasma'

1983 sees the first performances in Britain of music by Radulescu. On 28 April Roger Heaton gave the world premiere of *The Inner Time* for solo clarinet at the Purcell Room. On 31 July the composer will direct Circle in a concert of his works in Adrian Jack's MusICA series at the ICA; the programme will include *Ecou atins, Capricorn's Nostalgic Crickets*, and *Incandescent Serene*.

Paris is becoming, increasingly, the most interesting and stimulating centre for new music in Europe. It is the base for the Ensemble l'Itinéraire and for such important composers as Gerard Grisey and Tristan Murail, members of that 'alternative' movement which shuns the complexities of the post-integral serialists and explores sound itself by making the harmonic spectrum the substance of music. Among these composers Horatiu Radulescu stands out as one of the most imaginative and colourful figures working in France today.

Radulescu was born in Romania in 1942. He studied composition with Stefan Niculescu, Tiberiu Olah, and Aurel Stroe, and then undertook research into folklore at the Institute of Ethnology of the Romanian Academy of Sciences. In 1970 he left Romania to participate in the Ferienkurse für Neue Musik at Darmstadt and Cologne, and he has never returned to his native country to live: he settled in Paris, and became a French citizen in 1974. Radulescu is little known in Britain but on the Continent he is regarded as the most adventurous and least traditional composer of the 'alternative' group—a reputation that has been fostered by numerous commissions from the major festivals of contemporary music, French Radio, and IRCAM, and by frequent performances and broadcasts both in Europe and the USA; he has several committed interpreters, including the flautist Pierre-Yves Artaud and the double bass player Fernando Grillo. The instrumentation and titles of his works are always extravagant and exotic: *IHI19—requiem pour l'azur* (1972)¹ is for string quartet, harpsichord, 'prepared sound icons' (pianos), 19 gold and silver coins, 13 alto flutes, 19 reciters, 19 yoga dancers (with dynamic compressed feedback microphones), and tape; *Wild Incantesimo* (1978, composed for the Metz Festival) is scored for nine orchestras (162 players) whose parts are written on 4170 slides which are to be projected onto no fewer than 19 screens.

Sound Plasma—Music of the Future Sign (1969-73), written for the Danish Institute of Futurology, is both a performable prose composition and a theoretical text. Each page of the pamphlet is 'numbered' with a line of verse and the theoretical exposition is overlaid with 'stardust poetry' which evokes the 'universe' of the music Radulescu describes. He states that most music treats sound from the outside, that it simply organises sounds produced in traditional ways, and that even in the expanded sound world of electronic music, 'the old formal and aesthetic mania of acting with sounds has dominated'. In his own work, by contrast, he explores the possibility of sound's autonomy and its direct communication with the listener—he speaks of 'entering the sound'. While

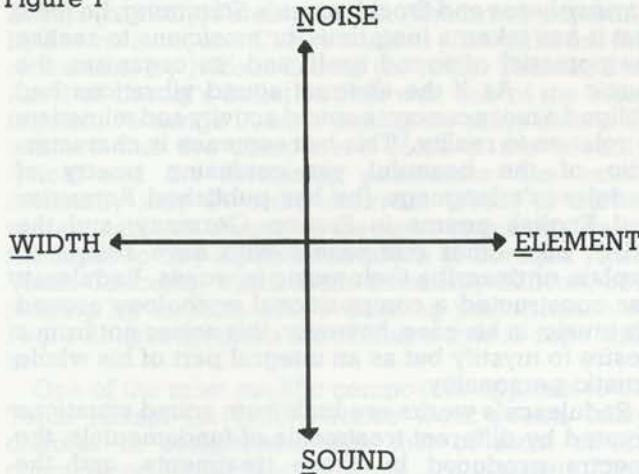
recognising the pure music of works such as Ligeti's *Atmospheres* and Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, he feels that it has taken a long time for musicians to realise the potential of sound itself, and 'its organism, the music . . . As if the abstract sound vibrations had obliged a more concrete sound activity and mimetism in relation to reality.' This last sentence is characteristic of the beautiful yet confusing poetry of Radulescu's language (he has published Romanian and English poems in France, Germany, and the USA). Like other composers who have sought to explain or describe their music in words, Radulescu has constructed a compositional mythology around his music; in his case, however, this arises not from a desire to mystify but as an integral part of his whole artistic personality.

Radulescu's works are built from sound situations created by different treatments of fundamentals, the spectra produced by these treatments, and the isolation of individual spectra. The music results 'naturally' from the initial organisation of sound sources and formal structures, its interest lying in the interaction of the resulting harmonics, difference tones, subtones, rhythmic beats, and so on. The texture thus produced is called the 'sound plasma'; there are no longer steps, interval jumps, chords, etc., but discreetly gliding and trembling narrow frequency bands, vibrating (living) sound plasma. Duration, by the lack of clear appearance and disappearance, is infinitely long or short, and no more an element of comparison. Hence, rhythm exists no longer as combined values, but only as spectrum pulse of the micro and macro sound plasma, or as an infrasonic trembling of the non-evident sound lava.

The 'narrow frequency band' is a fundamental pitch consisting of one or more of the natural and irregular frequencies that oscillate within any interval between a $\frac{1}{4}$ - and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -tone. This band 'emanates an aureole of harmonics'—the overtones in the harmonic series of the fundamental—which are isolated and/or 'amplified' in the music, forming the 'spectrum pulse'. The artificially organised rhythms of traditional music are replaced by this natural pulse, which is produced by two operations: the interaction of different sound sources (for example, the human voice with instruments, or electronic with recorded natural sounds), and the multiphonic treatment of a single sound. In the first operation opposing fundamentals, with their respective spectra, struggle to form a single spectrum; in the second a single spectrum fluctuates according to the performer's control.

Dynamics follow a similar pattern. Timbre is a consequence of the spectrum pulse, which is governed by the 'sound compass' and the 'global sound sources'. The axes of the 'sound compass' join opposites that represent a definition of the space in which the sound occurs (Figure 1). 'Noise' means 'unclearness, wave unperiodicity, irregularity, opaque spectrum, confusion between fundamentals and harmonics', and so on, and 'Sound' is its opposite; the micro pulses of the sound plasma, operating on the overtones of the narrow frequency band, produce colour changes resulting from the naturally irregular interaction of N and S, giving the music 'consistency, quality and space'. 'Width' stands for the 'wide atmospheres of agglomerate and dense sound plasma', and 'Element' for 'a narrow band of rarefied sound plasma'; their interaction gives rise to the macro pulse of the sound plasma, which gives the music its 'density, quantity and time' (that is, form). Radulescu gives two examples of the 'sound compass': the first shows the extreme limits of the sound space and the second the placing of traditional musics and natural sounds within that space (Figures 2 and 3). The micro and macro sound

Figure 1



plasma is multi-directional and envelops the total space continuously.

According to Radulescu the vibrations that are perpetually present in the environment are channelled to our senses through five 'global sound sources': the human source that produces vocal sounds, breath, etc. (H); the 'concrete' human source that organises sounds produced by H into language, articulation, etc. (L); natural sound such as birdsong, wind, or rain (N); an instrument or object (I/O), a cello or a stone, for example; and electronic sound (E). These five sources co-exist and interact to synthesise the sound plasma. They may be classified as objective (N) and subjective (L, I/O, H, E), a classification that can have a bearing on the relationship between the composer/performer and the music he creates—as, for example, when the sound source is natural-objective and is mediated or contained by subjective sources. To put it simply, the ways in which the global sound sources are treated must follow certain 'compositional' laws if their product is to fuse together and achieve 'the sound micro and macro plasma, as the real music of the future'.

Sound situations are set up by different syntheses of the sounds from the global sources, so that, for example, some sounds are modified and others concealed. The score of *Capricorn's Nostalgic Crickets* (1974), for seven woodwinds of the same type, consists of 96 pitches (some of which create $\frac{1}{4}$ - and $\frac{3}{4}$ -tone intervals), each notated by one of four

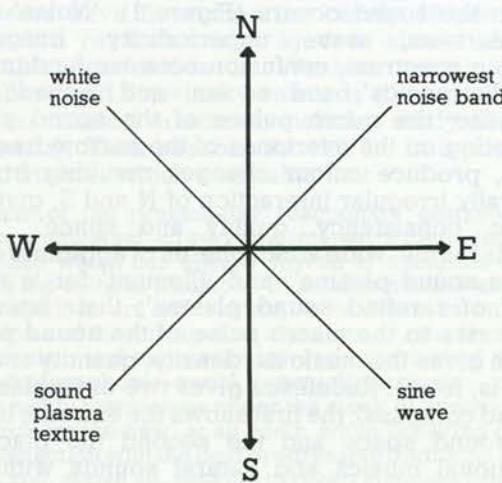
symbols which show the treatment to be applied to it. The four treatments are an irregular tremolo on a single pitch (applied only to pitches in the highest register), multiphonics, multiphonic trills or tremolos on the same fundamental, and flutter tonguing and singing in unison with the pitch; the global sound sources used are therefore I/O and H. Each player begins at a different position in the series of pitches and with a different type of treatment, so that each pitch is treated both by the player (creating the micro plasma) and by natural interaction with the other six pitches and treatments (forming the macro plasma). The sounds are intended to bear as little resemblance as possible to those of the instrument when it is played in the conventional way. Each pitch-event begins *pianissimo*, grows to a 'paroxysm in the middle region', and fades away again, lasting 11 seconds or longer; the transition from one to the next should be inaudible.

Similar sound situations are created in *Twilight Intricacy* (1973) for 13 double basses and 679 tuned gold and silver coins spun by 97 coin spinners, and *The Outer Time* (1979-80) for 23 flutes. In another group of works, including *Lamento di Gesù* (1973-5) for large orchestra and seven psalteries, and *Dorundi* (1976) for 48 solo voices (both composed for the Royan Festival), the spectrum pulse derives from a few spectra created by different treatments (filtering, ring modulation, reverberation, etc.) of the narrow frequency band.

Radulescu's mystical approach to composition is, perhaps, a throwback to the sixties (he cites *Stimmung* as an important influence). But whatever its origins, his work offers an alternative to the regression and conservatism of the neoromantics, the often impenetrable complexities of the post-integral serialists, and the mindlessness of much minimalism—a refreshingly different music which is both 'musical' and new.

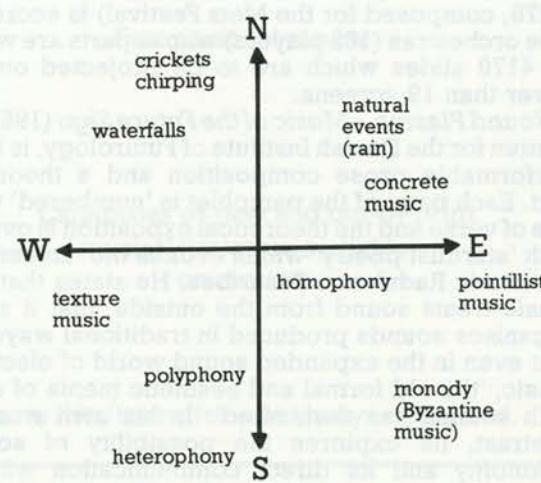
Nature and art in their highest degree of purity merge. Therefore the sound plasma as music of the . . . future should reach an abstract nature, created by us, which conceals—as nature does—both cause and effect, and thus surpasses its original condition ('handmade') by becoming a complex phenomenon.

Figure 2



¹ Until 1977 Radulescu's works were published by Edition Modern, Munich; since that date they have been published under the composer's own imprint.

Figure 3



Susan Bradshaw

Arvo Paart

Arvo Paart was born in Paide in Estonia in 1935. An only child, his parents separated almost before he was old enough to remember, and he was brought up by his mother, who was a kindergarten teacher, and stepfather. There was, he says, no music of any kind at home, not even on the radio, and it was only when the family moved to Rakvere, to a house where there happened to be a grand piano, that he was able to begin piano lessons at a children's music school in the town.¹ He was then eight years old and, right from the start, found that the pieces he was given to play were of frustratingly limited interest; he quickly got the idea of supplementing them with improvised compositions of his own and, from the age of about twelve, with fully notated ones.

Paart remained a pupil at the junior music school up to the age of 17, but he had no opportunity of hearing orchestral performances until as a teenager he discovered that recordings of classical music were sometimes transmitted over the public loudspeaker system in the town square; by bicycling round and round the square on those occasions he was gradually able to extend his musical horizons beyond the somewhat meagre educational fare offered by the school.

Paart's course as a full-time student at senior music school in Tallinn was interrupted by two years' compulsory military service, so it was not until 1958 that he was able to enrol as a post-graduate student at the conservatory there. At the same time he started work as a sound engineer at the local radio station—a post he held for the next ten years. At the conservatory Paart was a composition student of Heino Eller, who had been taught by Glazunov—Paart acknowledges the Russian composer as his 'musical grandfather'. Eller was evidently an open-minded mentor, giving his pupil every encouragement to explore the music of the post-war avant garde, which was beginning to filter through from the West in the early 1960s. Meanwhile Paart's tonal cantata *Meie aed* (Our garden; 1959) for children's voices and orchestra, had been awarded first prize in a state composers' competition. This demonstration of official approval perhaps did something to mitigate what he describes as 'the great scandal' that arose a couple of years later when, after studying such twelve-note scores as he could lay his hands on and working alone at a series of exercises by Eimert and Krenek, he produced the first twelve-note work by an Estonian composer.

By 1968 Paart was receiving sufficient offers of outside work to be able to leave his job at the radio station and become a freelance composer; from then until he left the Soviet Union for good in 1980 he lived mainly by writing music for films (around 50 in all), a task that gave him the chance to experiment with mixtures of tonal and serial composition. He also received a number of state and private commissions for his own, non-commercial work—*Pro et contra*, for example, was written at the request of Rostropovich—and towards the end of his time in Tallinn he was beginning to get his music published and to enjoy a certain public acclaim as the result of performances both at home and, increasingly, abroad. Three years ago he emigrated with his wife and two young sons to Vienna, and he is now an Austrian citizen though,

following a year spent on a scholarship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst in 1982, the family has settled in West Berlin. With 80 performances of his work throughout Europe in 1982 alone, Paart's reputation seems set to assure his material future—especially as he already has a number of commissions awaiting fulfilment, including a work for chamber ensemble and a cello concerto; he also has plans for another large-scale setting of biblical texts, as a companion-piece to his *Johannes-Passion* of 1981-2.

The decade following the composition of his prize-winning cantata saw both the beginning and the end of Paart's twelve-note period. *Credo* for piano, chorus, and orchestra (1968) was the last work written partly in this harmonic idiom, for he had already undergone an experience that changed his whole way of thinking. It was in 1967 that he first encountered plainsong, and he was completely overwhelmed by it; from that moment his path into the future seemed clear: chant, he says, offered 'a way to proceed', and he immediately began to search out old liturgical music of all kinds and to study the possibilities of unaccompanied melody in particular. Although a devout Russian Orthodox Christian, he had avoided crossing swords with the Soviet authorities until, in the wake of his discovery of plainsong, he started setting forbidden religious texts (the score I have of *Credo*, smuggled out through Helsinki, has no words). Paradoxically it was for religious reasons (his wife is Jewish) that he was finally permitted to leave the USSR.

Paart has travelled a long way in the 20 years that separate the *Johannes-Passion* from *Meie aed*, exploring remote musical terrain as a lone voyager rather than the well-beaten tracks of the package tourist. In many ways he seems to have been largely self-taught: for example, he says that when he rediscovered tonality as a pliable, workable language he had to learn it as if from scratch—his academic training had done little to prepare him for its living reality. Nor had his life as a freelance composer in the Soviet Union done anything to prepare him for a similar existence in the capitalist West. His first visit outside the Eastern block (to London in 1979) was clearly something of a shattering experience: having assumed himself to be an isolated voice, crying in the musical wilderness of his own choosing, he was suddenly brought face to face with more composers than he had ever known existed, and the wilderness turned out to be an already well-cultivated garden. He illustrates his naivety about life outside the USSR by relating how, when he found himself in Vienna, free for the first time in his life to telephone anywhere in the world, he immediately set about ringing all his friends—I myself received a call from him at peak time on a weekday morning—without realising that he would later have to pay for the pleasure!

Although Paart is now one of hundreds of composers in western Europe, he seems to be that one in a hundred who is unmistakably himself. He describes composing as a voyage of self-discovery, a 'search for one's own personality': 'music is no job for me; it's a matter of life and death'. Ever since he began so passionately to espouse the musical language of an earlier age, his prime consideration has been that of clarity, of 'simplifying things for myself'. He seems, in other words, to be trying to avoid any hint of complication for complication's sake; eschewing musical verbosity above all, he believes that anything that has no properly audible (as opposed to merely textual or cerebral) purpose has no place in his work.

Example 1a *Quintettino*, last movement

Musical score for Example 1a, showing parts for flute (fl), oboe (ob), clarinet (cl), bassoon (bn), and horn (hn). The score includes dynamic markings like *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, and 3, and performance instructions like 'cresc.' and 'f'.

1b *Quintettino*, closing bars

Close-up of the musical score for Example 1b, showing the final bars of the piece. It features a piano-like keyboard with various notes and rests, and a tempo marking 'G. P.'

Example 3 *For Alina*

Musical score for Example 3, 'For Alina', for piano. It shows two staves: treble and bass. Dynamics include *8va*, *p*, and *Ped.* The score consists of simple rhythmic patterns.

Example 4 *Missa sillabica*

Musical score for Example 4, 'Missa sillabica', showing two staves with vocal parts. The lyrics 'Ky-ri-e e-le-i-son' and 'Chri-ste e-le-i-son' are written below the notes, each followed by a 'x3' indicating repetition.

Not that Paart was ever a complex composer, even at the height of his twelve-note period: Example 1a, from the *Quintettino* for wind, is typically woven around the steady influence of a simple ostinato; he even seems at that time to have adopted a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude (see Example 1b, the end of the same work), which is quite alien to the almost religious fervour of his post-serial works. *Credo*, the piece that bridges the gap between the twelve-note and the tonal music, is based on the C major Prelude from Book I of Bach's 48. Here the argument between two irreconcilable harmonic styles is finally resolved as the serial element is literally blacked out (Example 2) by an improvised cacophony that makes way for a triumphant consolidation of the work's underlying tonality. In this respect the piece is not only a setting of the words of the *Credo* but also a personal affirmation of musical faith and a declaration of musical intent. There is also more than a suggestion of an abstract dimension to the harmonic conflict—of evil (in the form of twelve-note elements) exorcised by good (represented by tonality); ostensibly because of its overt liturgical connections, but perhaps also because of this underlying Christian message, the work was banned in the USSR for 13 years following its first performance, which took place, according to the composer, 'as if by a miracle'.

After completing *Credo* in 1968 Paart seems to have needed a breathing-space in which to consolidate his new ideas. The next eight years were devoted mainly (and usefully) to writing incidental music of various kinds; the only serious work he produced during this period was *Symphony no.3* (though 'serious' might be a misleading term if the piece reflects any of the Cageian do-it-yourself ideas that are reputed to colour *Symphony no.2*—unfortunately scores of all three symphonies have proved unavailable at the time of writing). Then, over the next couple of years, came a spate of small pieces (the longest lasting twelve minutes, the shortest only two minutes) quite unlike anything he had written before. Sparked off by the tiny occasional piano piece *For Alina* (Example 3), composed as a gift for a young Estonian girl on her own in London (which I was deputed to play for her!), other miniatures of a similar kind have played an important role in Paart's recent development. Written in what he calls his 'tintinabuli style', almost all of them are in rhythmic unison, being freely notated in the manner of plainsong, and seem to savour the simplest possible combinations of notes, often through repetition (Example 4). Several, such as *Fratres*, *Arbos*, and *Pari intervallo*, exist in more than one version, which underlines the impression they give of being music in the abstract, unrelated to particular qualities of sound; as in the music of an earlier age, only their different ranges distinguish those written for voices from those for instruments.

Not until *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977) did Paart allow himself to revert to a more strictly intellectual organisation of his material; but although a series of rhythmic canons forms a frame for the work, the idea of a quietly insistent repetition of the same melodic fragment still remains to the fore (Example 5). Both *Cantus* and *Tabula rasa*, also composed in 1977, were first performed in Tallinn later the same year. *Tabula rasa*, the first of two concertos for two string instruments and orchestra, is a chameleon-like work, which so closely mirrors the style of the Italian Baroque string composers that on casual hearing it seems more closely related to pastiche than to original composition. But a study of the score soon reveals that the composer is in fact subjecting each minutely different variant of his 'borrowed' style to the most careful personal

Example 2 *Credo*

40

2 Ott.

2 Fl.

2 Ob.

2 Cl. in sib.

2 Cl.b. in sib.

2 Fg.

2 Cfg.

4 Cor. in fa

4 Tr. in sib.

3 Tbn.

Tb.

Timp.

Xil.

Vibr.

Camp.

Tamt.

Piatti

Piatto

Tamb.

Tamt.

Gr. cassa

S.

A.

Coro

T.

B.

Pf.

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vle

Vc.

Cb.

Example 5 *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, opening

scrutiny, and that there is a lot more eventfulness of a coolly undemonstrative kind than at first meets the ear that is unprepared for so dispassionate an experience.

On his arrival in Vienna in 1980 Paart spent some time producing new versions of relatively old pieces and writing two small-scale works for voices and instruments—*Summa* and *De profundis*. He then embarked on the Concerto for violin, cello, and chamber orchestra (first performed in London in 1981) and his *magnum opus* to date, the *Johannes-Passion*, properly entitled *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem*. There is no score of the last work in London at the moment and, indeed the resources needed for an adequate examination of Paart's work are lacking generally; this article, then, can be no more than an interim report, pending the availability of further scores and recordings, and the mounting of British performances. But even on the current evidence, Paart has a wholly original, refreshingly untarnished outlook on the musical world of the late 20th century. He fits no obvious pigeon-hole, and while his work has featured recently in a festival of 'minimalist' music, he would seem to be attempting to derive the maximum expressive truth from means that are minimal by virtue of inner necessity rather than calculated design.

¹ All quotations come from conversations between the composer and the author.

Works

Information on publication is given in parentheses; Paart's music is now handled by Universal Edition (UE).

- Sonatine, piano, 1958 (Tallinn: Muzfond, 1958) [5']
- Partita, piano, 1958 (Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1959) [6']
- Meie aed [Our garden], children's choir, orchestra, 1959 (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1963) [10']
- Sonatine no.2, piano, 1959 (Tallinn: Muzfond, 1963) [5']
- Nekrolog, large ensemble, 1959 [10'30"]
- Perpetuum mobile, large ensemble, 1963 (UE 13560, 1968) [6']
- Musica sillabica, 12 instruments, 1964 [12']
- Quintettino, wind quintet, 1964 (Leipzig: Peters, 1977) [4']
- Diagrams, piano, 1964 [4']
- Solfeggio, unaccompanied choir, 1964 (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, n.d.) [3']
- Polifoniline sümfonia [Symphony no.1], string orchestra, 1964 (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1967) [15']

Collage on B-A-C-H, oboe, harpsichord, strings, 1964 (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1969)

Symphony no.2, large ensemble, 1966 (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1971) [12']

Pro et contra, cello, orchestra, 1966 (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1973) [9']

Credo, solo piano, mixed choir, large orchestra, 1968 (UE, 1982) [12']

Symphony no.3, large ensemble, 1971 (Leipzig: Peters, 1981)

For Alina, 1976, piano (UE 17247) [2']

Trivium, organ, 1976 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1977) [7']

Pari intervallo, 4 instruments ad lib., 1976 (UE) [3']

In spe, 4 voices, 10 instruments, 1976 [7']

Kui Bach oleks mesilasi pidanud [If Bach had been a beekeeper], harpsichord, electric guitar, chamber orchestra, tape; or harpsichord, string orchestra, 1976 (UE) [9']

Dies irae, choir, organ, 6 instruments, 1976-81 (UE) [7']

Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten, string orchestra, bell, 1977 (UE 17498, 1982) [6']

Tabula rasa, 2 violins, string orchestra, prepared piano, 1977 (UE 17249, 1981) [25']

Frates, ensemble of early instruments, 1977 (UE) [9']

Arbos, 7 wind instruments, 1977 (UE) [7']

Missa sillabica, 4 voices/chamber choir, 6 instruments, 1977 (UE) [12']

Cantate Domino canticum novum, 4 voices (SA/TB/SATB), 4 instruments, 1977 (UE) [5']

Variatsionid Arinuška terveks saamiseks [Variations on Arinushka's recovery], piano, 1977 (UE 17248) [4']

Peegel peeglis [Mirror within a mirror], violin, piano, 1978 (UE) [8']

Frates, violin, early instruments, 1980 (UE) [9']

Frates, violin, piano, 1980 (UE 17274, 1981) [8']

Annum per annum, organ, 1980 (UE 17179, 1982) [11']

Pari intervallo, string quartet/organ, 1980 (UE) [3']

Peegel peeglis [Mirror within a mirror], violin, piano, string orchestra, 1980 (UE) [8']

Arbos, recorders, 1980 (UE 17443, 1982) [7']

Summa, tenor/baritone/SATB, 6 instruments, 1980 (UE 17224, 1983) [7']

De profundis, men's voices, organ, percussion, 1981 (UE 17410) [8']

Pari intervallo, 4 recorders, 1981 (UE 17444, 1981) [3']

Concerto, violin, cello, chamber orchestra, 1981 (UE 17416) [22']

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem [Johannes-Passion], 4 male voices, SATB chorus, organ, instruments, 1981-2 (UE) [90']

Frates, 12 cellos, 1982 (UE) [9']

Frates, strings, percussion, 1983 (UE) [9']

Example 1 is reproduced by kind permission of Peters Edition Limited, and Examples 2-5 by kind permission of Universal Edition (Alfred A. Kalmus Ltd.).

Peter Phillips

The Ritual Music of John Tavener

John Tavener made a tremendous impression with his first major work, *The Whale*, in 1968.¹ Like the public image of its composer, the music was colourful and unpredictable, and it caused a lot of excitement. Tavener has produced no other work that has had quite so wide an appeal, but several pieces have aroused more than specialist interest, especially *Ultimos ritos* on its televisation in 1974, *Thérèse* when it was staged at Covent Garden in 1979, and *Akhmatova: Requiem* in performances at the Edinburgh Festival and the Proms in 1980. However, though Tavener has never stopped writing, nor felt that his inspiration was flagging, he has become increasingly indifferent to publicity. This is partly the result of a deepening commitment to Christianity, which has led him to set himself squarely against fashion. What kind of music has he been writing recently and how can it be judged?

Tavener's fundamental impulse to compose has remained unchanged. He has always needed the inspiration of words, and these have been almost exclusively religious. The only significant exceptions are two settings of love poetry: *Sappho: Lyrical Fragments* (1980) for two sopranos and string orchestra; and the song cycle *To a Child Dancing in the Wind*² again for soprano, to poems by Yeats, which is the most recent work he has completed. But even in these secular pieces there is strong evidence of the techniques that shape his sacred writing: in *Sappho*, the repeated intoning of the same phrase, which creates a sense of distance in time without diluting the intensity of Sappho's love; in the Yeats songs, vocal phrases that are reminiscent of the chant idiom on which his sacred style is partly based.

Tavener's constant recourse to poetry has given him fluency in writing for voices, the medium with which he feels most comfortable, and in which he has achieved his widest expressive range. Much of his music has featured solo soprano parts, some of them highly virtuosic, some deliberately restricted in compass and contemplative in style. In works such as *In alium* (1968) and *A Celtic Requiem* (1969) the soprano line is extrovert and dramatic—*In alium*, for instance, uses a high *f''* sharp—and is supported by lush harmonies which Tavener says were influenced by Messiaen.³ As his introversion increased, this rich and brilliant vein declined, and has now totally disappeared: the title role of *Thérèse*, for example, though still very much a coloratura part, is noticeably more sober than those of the earlier works. Tavener claims that in *Akhmatova: Requiem* (1979-80) he discovered a new lyrical style, which he has been refining ever since. The Yeats cycle shows the latest stage in this process: the line is indeed lyrical, but it is at the same time condensed and austere, with a sparse and intimate accompaniment provided by flute, viola, and harp.

Since he composed *Akhmatova: Requiem* Tavener has converted to the Russian Orthodox faith and has devoted himself almost entirely to setting texts connected with the Orthodox Church and its teachings. Recently he has built several pieces round texts that consist of a single word—*Doxa* (1982), for instance, enshrines the Orthodox concept of glory.

(This is essentially the same technique that he used in *Nomine Jesu* (1970), which reinforces the impression that his approach to composition remains fundamentally constant.) A similar idea is pursued in some textless pieces, sections of which symbolise different religious concepts: the organ work *Mandelion* (1981) is based on a series of iconic images, including the Annunciation, the Flight into Egypt, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection; the music is held together by means of a twelve-note set derived from chant.

The ritual element of the Orthodox liturgy has affected the character and even the construction of Tavener's music at every level. Superficially the influence is obvious. A ritual makes its effect by repetition and by a dramatic ethos which it inspires but does not control; its component actions are discrete—there is no attempt at development of ideas, and no fixed duration. The music Tavener has written under this influence, like much of the medieval and Renaissance sacred repertory, seems understated; the drama is left to the imagination of the listener rather than overtly expressed. A simple example is *The Great Canon of the Ode of St Andrew of Crete* (1981). The text consists of 25 short verses, between which Tavener has inserted the refrain 'Have mercy upon me, O God', in a regular sequence of English, Greek, and Old Church Slavonic. The refrain is set to a succession of sonorous chords for mixed choir; each repetition is pitched a semitone lower than the last, so that as a whole the work presents the impression of a long act of prostration, which is entirely suitable to the text. The words of St Andrew are sung by a solo bass in chant style. The length of the piece is determined purely by the length of the text; there is no development at all of musical material.

This is a straightforward case; I detect a more subtle ritual influence in some of Tavener's other recent pieces, where he achieves a pervading stillness by means that most composers would use to develop their ideas. In *Doxa* (1982) for double choir the mathematics of composition are immanent. The piece is cast in five massive blocks. The bass pedal notes sung in each block by choir I combine to form the first five notes of a melody that constitutes the only material of the piece: the other voices of choir I sing this melody (sometimes in retrograde form) over and over at different speeds, none of which is faster than very slow minims; choir II follows in strict canon at the distance of a bar, though the two middle voices are exchanged. There is not a note in the piece outside this scheme, yet the music has strong affinities with *The Great Canon*. It is my impression that the character and impact of the music depend very little on the details of the scheme; much more important are the sonorities of the five blocks and, particularly, the silences between them, which are very carefully marked and, as Nicholas Kenyon has pointed out, are as important as the music itself.⁴ The same could be said often of pure ritual.

Tavener says that in *Doxa*, written for the Tallis Scholars, he came as close as he has ever been to the music of his near namesake, the great Renaissance composer, from whom he claims descent. But he does not need unaccompanied choirs to create these effects. In *Towards the Son* (1982)⁵ he writes for symphony orchestra, though he excludes the upper strings and adds four bowed psalteries and an exotic percussion section; voices are included only in the last few bars, where three solo trebles, off stage, sing a Greek text. Despite the difference in forces, *Towards the Son* has a block-based construction that is in essence very similar to that of *Doxa*. A twelve-note row generates twelve sections; each of the notes

of the row, taken in succession, forms the pedal note for one section. But here not every note is controlled by the scheme—a modal scale is heard throughout in counterpoint with the twelve-note theme—and this freer construction is matched by the more colourful scoring. There is also a greater variety of activity over the pedal notes than in *Doxa*, though some of the same procedures are used, notably the playing of the main theme at a number of different speeds at once. The scheme allows something of a sense of movement within each section, but the overall effect is still static. Towards the end, after the twelve sections have been played out, a climax occurs in which the row and its twelve progeny are reviewed in concise form; but even here the excitement is generated not through musical development but by the sheer weight of repetition.

It is interesting that Tavener's approach to 'intellectual music' is suspicious; indeed he hopes to achieve an eschatological music by renouncing intellectualism. This may sound strange coming after analyses of *Doxa* and *Towards the Son*, but Tavener maintains that his structural formulae have in large part become intuitive, a means to an expressive end. He refers to the reception given in London to the first performances there of music by Arvo Paart, one of the few 20th-century composers whom he admires: the critics were bored by its simplicity. It is this very simplicity in Paart's music—what Tavener calls its 'stripped quality'—that draws him.

In a more general way he feels out of sympathy with those composers who seem to have it on their consciences that they must express violence. In a social climate in which music is often the vehicle for political statement Tavener's preoccupations have put him very much out on a limb. The text of *Akhmatova: Requiem*, for example, which is a poem by the acmeist poet Anna Akhmatova, has profoundly political undertones, yet Tavener chose it for its expressive qualities and because he found that he could adapt its quasi-liturgical construction to his own art by interpolating phrases of genuine liturgical text. He was neither unaware of, nor unreceptive to, the element of protest in the poem, but his purpose in setting it was entirely spiritual.

Reactions to the first performance of *Akhmatova: Requiem* were more extreme than ever before in Tavener's experience: it was hailed by some as a masterpiece, but roundly condemned by others. Its detractors found their fears realised in his next work, *Prayer for the World* (1981), which was written for the John Alldis Choir and is scored for 16 solo voices. Tavener's own account of this piece as the most extreme example of its kind in his oeuvre justifies Paul Griffiths's comment that the composer had 'gone beyond audiences and criticism into his own rite'.⁶ Some indication of the mood of the music is given by markings such as 'Still, with great inner intensity' and 'Sudden changes of time or dynamic should be avoided'. The insuperable difficulty with *Prayer for the World* is that it is, on the one hand, unsuitable for the commercial concert hall, but on the other much too demanding for most church and cathedral choirs. The love poems of Yeats helped Tavener out of this dilemma, for they suggested a more approachable form of musical expression; but he has not yet settled the question of how worldly he is prepared to be.

Tavener is now working on 'a large-scale para-liturgical drama', based on Byzantine texts, for Winchester Cathedral. The character of the work is foreshadowed in *The Whale*, but the presentation will be less flamboyant and the moral stance more sober. Tavener has been courageous to follow his star into these unfashionable areas of thought; his whole-

hearted commitment to a spiritual music in a largely secular time is its own justification.

- 1 *The Whale* is to be revived at the Royal Festival Hall on 23 October 1983; it will be performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Richard Hickox.
- 2 The first performance of the Yeats song cycle will be given by the Sioned Williams Harp Trio with soprano soloist at the Little Missenden Festival on 16 October 1983.
- 3 All quotations come from conversations between the composer and the author.
- 4 *The Times*, 14 September 1982, p.12
- 5 The first performance of *Towards the Son* will be given by the City of London Sinfonia, conducted by Richard Hickox, in the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 15 November 1983.
- 6 *The Times*, 1982.

Works

A selective list of Tavener's works to 1980 may be found in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*; his music is published by J. & W. Chester, from whom further details may be obtained.

- Akhmatova: *Requiem* (Anna Akhmatova), dramatic soprano, bass, orchestra, 1979-80; first performed by Phyllis Bryn-Julson, John Shirley-Quirk, BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 20 August 1981
- Sappho: *Lyrical Fragments* (Sappho), 2 sopranos, small string orchestra, 1980; first performed by Bronwen Mills, Janis Kelly, Academy of London, conducted by Richard Stamp, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 25 April 1981
- Risen! (from the Liturgy of the Announcement of the Resurrection celebrated on Holy Saturday in the Orthodox Church), chorus, SATB, orchestra, 1980, written for the rebuilding of the Great Hall of Bedford School; first performed by Bedford School Choir and Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Morris, Bedford School, 19 October 1981
- The Great Canon of the Ode of St Andrew of Crete (St Andrew of Crete, Ode I), bass, chorus SSAATTBB, 1981; first performed by Winchester Cathedral Choir, conducted by Martin Neary, Winchester Cathedral, 23 July 1981
- Prayer for the World (Hesychast prayer), 16 solo voices, 1981; first performed by John Alldis Choir, Round House, London, 11 October 1981
- Funeral Ikos (St John of Damascus, troparia), chorus SATB, 1981; first performed by Tallis Scholars, conducted by Peter Phillips, Keble College Chapel, Oxford, 1 December 1981
- Trisagion, brass quintet, 1981, written for the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble
- Mandelon, organ, 1981; first performed by Peter Sweeney, St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, 27 June 1982
- Doxa*, choruses SATB, SATB, 1982; first performed by Tallis Scholars, conducted by Peter Phillips, Wigmore Hall, London, 12 September 1982
- Lord's Prayer (English and Old Church Slavonic), chorus SATB, 1982; first performed by Tallis Scholars, conducted by Peter Phillips, Wigmore Hall, London, 12 September 1982
- The Lamb (William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*), chorus SATB, 1982; first performed by Winchester Cathedral Choir, conducted by Martin Neary, Winchester Cathedral, 22 December 1982
- Towards the Son: Ritual Procession (Trisagion), 3 boys' voices (off stage), strings, trombone, percussion, 1982
- He hath Entered Heaven, trebles, optional handbells, 1982-3, written for the 50th anniversary of the consecration of the chapel of Lady Margaret Hall; first performed by Lady Margaret Hall Chapel Choir, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, 16 January 1983
- To a Child Dancing in the Wind, (William Butler Yeats), soprano, flute, viola, harp, 1983

Robert Frederick Jones Bowen on Tippett

Meirion Bowen, *Michael Tippett* (London: Robson Books, 1982), £7.95

In Britain it is quite easy to become acquainted with the music of Michael Tippett, by listening to the radio and making use of the record and music collections provided in public libraries. The situation in North America is very different. With few exceptions it is only in large university music libraries that one can find a good selection of Tippett's scores and recordings, and anyone who does not have access to such a library will stand little chance of experiencing the full range of his achievement. I know two generally well-informed American musicians, both of whom regard Tippett as a great composer: one of them has heard only the Concerto for Double String Orchestra and the other knows only the Third Symphony. For them and others like them a self-contained introductory study of Tippett's music would offer an overview that they have no means of achieving by their own researches.

Meirion Bowen's *Michael Tippett*, one of the first volumes in Robson's new series 'The Contemporary Composer', is designed to be 'readily accessible to the student and interested layman alike'. It would seem from this that it aims at the same general class of readers as David Matthews in his *Michael Tippett: an Introductory Study* (London: Faber, 1980), but closer examination reveals that this is not really the case. For one thing, some of Bowen's musical discussion demands a fairly sophisticated degree of musical knowledge. He does include 'A Glossary of Technical Terms' but this is of limited usefulness and only emphasises Bowen's indecision about the level of musical awareness required in his audience: the reader who needs definitions of 'oratorio' and 'recitative' is unlikely to know what a canon is either, but this term goes unexplained; and anyone who needs definitions of any such terms will not get far with Bowen's analyses. A further limitation of the book's usefulness as an introduction to Tippett is the absence of clear synopses of Tippett's operas—Bowen seems to suppose that the reader already knows the stories.¹ Finally, although there are 28 music examples, most of them are extremely brief, and for much of the time reference to the scores is essential if the reader is to follow Bowen's train of thought. In this respect Matthews's study, which has several very lengthy music examples, is a better introduction for the musically literate reader who is not already familiar with Tippett's style.

It is obvious, then, that Bowen's book aims a bit higher than Matthews's and, considered on that level, it is excellent. The chapters on the music are arranged neither chronologically nor by genre, but rather by theme, with some works discussed in more than one section. Chapter 7, 'Form and Fantasy', is especially good in its lucid presentation of the various formal procedures Tippett has employed in his large-scale works. Bowen contrasts three basic formal principles, which he calls 'sonata', 'fantasia', and 'mosaic' styles, and discusses relatively pure examples of each, before going on to tackle the problem of the interaction of these basically opposed techniques in many of Tippett's most complex works.

The following chapter, 'Time and Eternity', contains several pages on *The Vision of Saint Augustine*. Some of Bowen's most difficult as well as most illuminating writing is found here. He demonstrates that while a superficial examination of the score, with its lay-out in short sections in 14 different tempos, would lead one to assume that it is a sectional, 'mosaic'-style work like the Second Piano Sonata, the way in which the material is handled, with certain key motivic and harmonic formations developed through various stages of elaboration from section to section, creates a totally different effect. Bowen carefully traces some of the most significant strands in the resulting musical web and is particularly impressive in his correlation of the musical development with the progress of the text.² I cannot imagine that even the most devoted admirer of this work will not have his appreciation of it deepened by spending an hour or so reading Bowen's analysis and tracking down all his references in the score.

I now turn to criticisms of specific points raised by Bowen's book. Although I shall discuss some of them at length, proposing alternative interpretations of my own, I want to make clear that they concern only a small proportion of what Bowen writes about, and are not meant to reflect negatively on the overall high quality of his work.

On pp.110 and 111 Bowen gives a table presenting the order of elements appearing in Tippett's Second Piano Sonata. The duration of each segment is given in number of bars, a procedure I find somewhat misleading as the bars are of many different lengths and of eight different tempos ranging from $J = 40$ to $J = 200$ (the shortest bar lasts less than 0.9" while the longest lasts 4.5"). Bowen does not try to draw any conclusions from his numbers, so no damage is done. He does, however, divide the piece into eight sections, each containing between one and 18 of the segments; nowhere does he give his criteria for defining the beginning of a new section, nor are they apparent from his table. The method employed results in an oversimplification of the structure of the piece. It is important to recognise that many of the segments begin by picking up a train of thought that started in an earlier segment in the same tempo.³ Furthermore, the important structural divisions of the piece do not necessarily occur at the point where a new segment begins. The arrival of the 'dolce cantabile' theme in bar 34 is a particularly clear example. The first appearance of Tempo 4 (bars 15–20) attempts a lead-in to this theme. The 'leggero scorrevole' music begins, however, at the 'wrong' pitch level and goes astray harmonically on the sixth quaver of bar 18, to be cut off at the end of bar 20. The segment in Tempo 5 intervenes, and in bar 30 (which Bowen calls the beginning of section B) the 'leggero scorrevole' material is picked up again, at a new pitch level and with slightly different harmonic implications; this time it leads to a major point of arrival in bar 34, the appearance of the 'dolce cantabile' theme. The sense of 'structural downbeat' that occurs here leads me to regard this, rather than bar 30, as the beginning of a new section.

On p.118 Bowen gives an outline of the sequence of segments in the opening movement of Tippett's Third Symphony. In this movement, which features the alternation and eventual combination of two types of music in different tempos, the bars—unlike those of the Second Piano Sonata—are all of the same duration⁴ so that tabular representation can vividly show one feature of the large-scale organisation of the movement. Unfortunately some misprints have crept into Bowen's table, some numbers are wrong and others are printed in the wrong order. I also think

that it is a mistake to split up the final Tempo 2 segment into two parts (the second beginning at fig.87), as an important feature of the combination of tempos is the listener's sense that the Tempo 2 music continues while the Tempo 1 material is brought in against it. Bowen's table also obscures the fact that the segments of each tempo get progressively longer until the 'early' arrival of the final segment of Tempo 1. I would therefore summarise the movement as follows (the figures show numbers of bars in each segment):

Tempo 1	6	9	23	46	96	67
'Arrest'						
Tempo 2	9	17	54*	90	(30 + 67)	
'Movement'						97

*includes 2 bars of 2/4

Bowen, unlike Matthews who is almost consistently ecstatic in his praise, has quite severe reservations about some of Tippett's works. I think that at least one of his adverse judgments, that of *The Ice Break*, should not go unchallenged, especially as his low opinion of the work is so widely shared. I must preface my remarks with the admission that I know *The Ice Break* only from a study of the score—I have seen none of the productions; while this might seem to be a liability, I believe that it is just as likely to be an advantage. Tippett's stage directions for much of the opera are quite minimal, so the producer is faced with the problem of having to invent much action in order to realise the composer's sketchy indications.⁵ I think it possible that Bowen sometimes mistakes inadequacies of the productions he has seen for flaws in the opera itself.

Bowen has two principal complaints about *The Ice Break*: he considers that the characterisation (except for Hannah) relies on stereotypes and that the Astron scene (Act 3 scene 5) is a failure. Regarding the first problem he writes:

It is probably a weakness of Tippett's method that a number of figures here are only the sum of their parts. Their various traits are not fused, their private and public behaviour do not coalesce. They are in part prisoners of Tippett's theme. [p.87]

This is severe criticism indeed. In Tippett's defence I can only state that from my study of the score I can clearly see opportunities for talented performers, working in a production sympathetic to the composer's aims, to bring some very credible characters to life on the stage.

Bowen remarks about the Astron scene:

In *The Ice Break*, Astron... brings the opera to its intended climax of revelation in the scene entitled *The Psychedelic Trip*. Unfortunately, this scene does not live up to its aims. The flow of lyricism characteristic of Tippett's music in all such visionary episodes is subverted by the restless tempo and fragmented outline of the music... The scene is one of Tippett's few failures in a domain where normally he enjoys prodigious success. [pp.135-6]

I think that here Bowen has misread the purpose of the scene: in order to understand it one must see its place in the larger design. The third act emphasises for the most part very intense individual experiences. The Astron scene is, in its immediate context, an interruption of the principal dramatic argument. The music at the beginning of scene 6 picks up the same tempo and much of the musical content of scene 4. Dramatically, too, the Astron scene is meant more as a comic intermezzo than as the 'climax of revelation'. One of the principal themes of the opera is the submerging of individual personality in the crowd. Before Act 3 scene 5 the chorus was last involved in

the mindless violence of the race riot in Act 2; in the Astron scene their mood, though certainly more pacific, is just as mindless. Once again, individual personality is suppressed, this time in the drug-induced quest for revelation. The revelation, when it comes, takes the form of Astron's two platitudes, each greeted with extravagant expressions of awe by the chorus. (There is a definite element of parody in the choral reactions at figs.381 and 385; the brass writing in the latter passage strikes me as something like self-parody on Tippett's part.)

That the scene cannot be regarded purely at the level of comic relief, however, is revealed in scene 8 when, at the climax of Yuri's operation, the 'chorus from the Paradise Garden whirls through the hospital like a Carnival rout. Somersaults and cart-wheels would be in order.'⁶ They sing Astron's second revelation, the hymn to spring. Clearly this is not a scene to be interpreted on the realistic level. Tippett is using, as he so often does, Blake's opposition of innocence and experience: the chorus in scene 5 can be understood as a representation of a state of unthinking innocence, a deliberate stunting of growth caused by the refusal to accept experience; the bell-ringing, cart-wheeling, spring-hymning crowd, running through the hospital as Yuri is 'reborn' from his cast, is an expression of innocence recaptured through experience, a visual and aural analogue to the transformation that Yuri and Lev are going through, which makes possible their reconciliation in the final scene.

Some small slips have crept into the text (especially where Roman numerals are concerned). Most of the music examples have been photocopied from the printed scores and it is time publishers realised that, if they are going to do this, care must be taken not to clip away essential information such as clefs (pp.66 and 75) and the keys of transposing instruments (the trumpets on p.60 are in B flat, the one on pp.149-50 is in C; the clarinet and bass clarinet on p.150 are in B flat). At the end of the book there is a section called 'Tippett in Interview' consisting of remarks by the composer from interviews covering the period from 1963 to 1980. I would have appreciated indications of when the various remarks were made since Tippett's views on some subjects may very well have changed over a 17-year period.

¹ They may be found, with some fascinating material on the genesis of *The Midsummer Marriage*, in Eric Walter White, *Tippett and his Operas* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1979).

² One quibble: the word 'tu', which the baritone ecstatically emphasises at fig.7 and which sets off the chorus's 'Deus, Creator omnium', surely refers to God, not to Monica, as Bowen states on p.137.

³ I do not mean to imply that the music is picked up again at exactly the same point at which it was cut off (the scissors-and-paste procedure described by Stravinsky in connection with the final section of his *Orpheus*). Instead, Tippett often creates the effect of a return to music that has been continuing somewhere else while the listener's attention was focused on the interrupting material; it is rather like jumping around the radio dial trying to listen to different pieces of music on eight different stations.

⁴ The 2/4 bars of Tempo 1 ($\text{J} = 88$) are equal in length to the 3/4 bars of Tempo 2 ($\text{J} = 132$). (The only exception occurs in one of the longer segments of Tempo 2: there are 2 bars of 2/4 between figs.27 and 28.)

⁵ The producer also has to find solutions to the problem of sudden changes from scenes of frantic mob activity to scenes of a private nature, featuring the soliloquies and conversations of the principal characters. These shifts, influenced by the cutting techniques of the cinema, are a

recurring feature of the opera. Solutions that rely on the virtuoso handling of stage machinery are unfortunately apt to distract the audience by drawing its attention to the producer's ingenuity when it should be focused on the intimate drama unfolding on the stage. I have the impression from reading reviews of the original production that the display of theatrical technology tended to dwarf the drama. I don't think that the problem is insoluble, but the solution must rely on theatrical imagination rather than technology.

⁶ Tippett's stage direction, Act 3 scene 8.

Michael Taylor Griffiths on Modern Music

Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Modern Music from Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), £5.50

—, *Modern Music: the Avant Garde since 1945* (London: J. M. Dent, 1981), £15.00

When I set out to read and review these books I admit that I had no very clear idea as to what might be Paul Griffiths's purpose in writing them or who might be intended to read them. I can now report that the *Concise History* is directed at the layman and *Modern Music* at the more sophisticated reader, but I am no nearer to being convinced of the need for such surveys as these. They seem to spring from the unstated (but nonetheless pervasive) conviction that the music of this century requires explication as an aid to its 'appreciation'—a peculiarly 19th-century attitude that recalls the predilection of that period for programmatic adjuncts to musical works.

Historical surveys inevitably tend to reflect the subjective viewpoint of their authors, even when the passage of time has largely purged the debate of personal loyalties and sympathies; but the contemporary historian has to struggle to disentangle fact from wishful thinking, to avoid polemics that seek to assert the supremacy of one school of thought over its rivals, and to guard against a preoccupation with novelty, which is often well-nigh impossible to distinguish from substance—and all this without the benefit of the *cordon sanitaire* of time. At best, it seems to me, all that can be achieved is a provisional catalogue of recurrent ideas and a listing of those composers generally judged to be important. To attempt to draw conclusions about the reasons for their importance and to distinguish lines of development on the basis of information, the value of which we are simply not in a position to assess, seems to be courting disaster. That Griffiths, particularly in *Modern Music*, essays both tasks—expository and judgmental—gives a curiously uneven quality to these books. He leaves himself open to criticism not only concerning whom he includes and whom he omits, but also, and more important, the criteria on which he bases the connections he perceives between composers.

The *Concise History of Modern Music* lays no claim to be other than a very general introduction to the topic. Essentially descriptive, it makes frequent reference to the artistic milieu of a period to underline the observations on its music; the illustrations, if somewhat familiar, are generally appropriate. Choosing Debussy's *L'après-midi d'un faune* as a convenient starting-point, Griffiths singles out features that he sees as demonstrating a fundamental

break with 'tradition'. Repeatedly, in both books, we are brought back to this 'fact' of revolution against the accepted norm (the shadow of Boulez is never wholly absent), though neither its validity nor the preconceptions it imposes is ever questioned. Beyond a few mild protestations that Webern never intended his music to be regarded as pointing the way towards 'total' serialism, Griffiths never pauses to inquire what happens if you extrapolate from a coherent musical work a group of independently observed criteria concerning, for example, duration, apply them unilaterally in a systematised way, and leave them to fight it out with other equally 'logically' derived organisations. The concept of 'serial logic' is swallowed whole without any attempt to relate it to musical logic. This leads easily to an acceptance of the idea that the integration of serial systems for pitch and duration (whether on an arithmetical or proportional basis) is both desirable and an aid to comprehension. While one cannot lay the blame for this misconception wholly on Griffiths it is unfortunate that such hoary old fables should be perpetuated in a book with a 'popular' slant.

The links between the two books are not confined to their joint endorsement of the common 20th-century myths; *Modern Music* displays an uncomfortably close relationship, both in style and sequence of ideas, to the latter part of the *Concise History*, and I was surprised to discover that the family likeness even extends to the author's Boulez volume.¹ The *Concise History* mentions George Rochberg as an example of a composer who has rejected many facets of 20th-century music and has created a style reminiscent of late Beethoven; *Modern Music* also refers to Rochberg, who could hardly be called a representative of the avant garde, and this is the more inappropriate as there is no mention of Carter after a brief note on his First Quartet and Lutosławski is dispatched with an equal paucity of detail.

There is a certain lack of discrimination and a sense of proportion in Griffiths's coverage, no attempt to suggest relativities or relevances. In his effort to attain what he regards as a degree of comprehensiveness Griffiths treats us to a seemingly endless disquisition on minor American tape works, without a hint that they are comparatively unimportant. The great virtue of the Americans seems to be their rigorous systematicness: 'That eight bars of music may demonstrate so much organization is some measure of Babbitt's ability to make everything in his compositions serve a constructive function.' (p.40, referring to the opening of the *Three Compositions for Piano*). But in my view the completeness of the system is often in inverse proportion to the musical value of the composition—it is undeniable that the audible processes of Reich have a much more 'musically' conceived structure.

The division of *Modern Music* into two parts—1945 to 1960 and the 1960s and 1970s—is underscored by a shift from a chronological presentation in the first part to one determined by aesthetic considerations and genre in the second. There is much less discussion of technical feature (not structural, technical) in the second part, except in those cases (for example, Stockhausen's *Mantra*) where the composer himself has provided detailed comments (there is also a section on Boulez's *Éclat* and *Rituel*, again drawn from Griffiths's Boulez book). This emphasises the fact that the majority of the detailed commentary in the first half is culled from the work of others (all duly acknowledged), the author seeking simply to present the material to its best advantage. These borrowings cause occasional stylistic problems and duplications;

they also result in linking passages of a rather obvious kind: 'Total serialism had become, if only for a short period, the most pressing necessity for composers of Boulez's generation, and it was in Darmstadt in July 1951, as Schoenberg lay dying on the other side of the Atlantic, that some of the crucial first steps were taken.' (p.46) In general, however, the writing is efficient and clear, though the ambiguous description of Gordon Mumma's *Hornpipe* (1967) is enough to goad Mrs Whitehouse into action were a public performance planned: '*Hornpipe* . . . requires the player, on horn, to wear a "cybersonic console"' (p.175).

I found reading these two books a rather depressing experience: far from encouraging me to listen to the music under discussion, they had the effect of distancing the subject matter and divorcing it from the concrete musical experience. There are other books that address the same topics (for example, Arnold Whittall's *Music since the First World War*) but seem to me to broach the problems Griffiths avoids, reaching beyond catalogues of techniques and neat encapsulations of style to deal with the music directly. Perhaps Griffiths would argue that this was never his intention: to me there doesn't seem much point in doing anything else—except of course listen to the music.

¹ Paul Griffiths, *Boulez*, Oxford Studies of Composers, 16 (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).

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Michael Hall

Birtwistle in Good Measure

Harrison Birtwistle

Hoquetus David (Machaut) (Universal Edition 15368, 1981), £4.50

Prologue (UE 15491, 1981), £5.35

Dinah and Nick's Love Song (UE 16040, 1981), £4.00

Silbury Air (UE 16141, 1979) £15.00

Carmen Arcadiae mechanicae perpetuum (UE 16166, 1981), £10.50

These scores of Birtwistle's works are particularly welcome because some of them are long overdue: the arrangement of Machaut's motet was made for a tour undertaken by the Pierrot Players in 1969; the setting of the watchman's prologue to Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* was commissioned for the 1971 English Bach Festival; and the wedding of Dinah and Nick Wood took place in 1972. Only *Silbury Air* of 1977 and *Carmen Arcadiae mechanicae perpetuum*, which was written to celebrate the tenth birthday of the London Sinfonietta in 1978, have arrived in good time. In fairness to Universal Edition, however, I should point out that these publications are not recent. One has been available for four years. Publishing houses are not the only ones who are tardy.

Hoquetus David may be an arrangement, but if anyone wants a clue as to how Birtwistle goes about his business, it is the piece to consider first. Birtwistle had difficulty making a start as a composer. He was never attracted to serialism, even though pieces such as *Zeitmasze* influenced him deeply; nor was he interested in what he calls 'goal-orientated' tonal methods. It was only when Maxwell Davies introduced him to medieval techniques that he discovered how to proceed. Since then all his music has been based on single melodic lines, or monody, which he structures isorhythmically: the essence of his method is to take a repeating pitch pattern (the equivalent of the medieval *color*) and project onto it a repeating durational pattern of different length (*talea*). He thus creates a cyclic rather than a goal-orientated form. There are various means by which he varies these patterns sequentially, but in order to thicken the line, as it were, he always uses a very idiosyncratic species of free organum in which the voices perpetually cross. Other lines are created by hocketing procedures.

Using these techniques it was inevitable that Birtwistle would want to arrange the Machaut motet, which is not only isorhythmic and a fine example of hocketing, but quite remarkable harmonically because of the bold and unexpected way the parts cross. Birtwistle wanted the arrangement to have a bell-like quality so he scored it for flute doubling piccolo, clarinet in C, glockenspiel, bells, violin, and cello. Throughout, each of the three voices—triplum, hoquetus and tenor—is supplied with a 'quint', the name given to the fourth partial tone of a bell, which sounds a fifth above the strike note. This makes the harmony even more remarkable.

Birtwistle often uses bells or bell-like sonorities. If those in *Hoquetus David* sound like a medieval French carillon, that in *Prologue* resembles the one tolled by the ground swell in Eliot's *The Dry Salvages*: a bell that 'measures time not our time . . . a time older than the time of chronometers'. It warns of dark things

under the surface, in this case of immanent catastrophe in Argos; as the watchman awaits news from Troy its haphazard sound becomes increasingly ominous until, at the words 'a man's will nurses hope', it clangs with terrifying menace. The work is scored for tenor, bassoon, horn, two trumpets, trombone, violin, and double bass, and the monody is given to horn and bassoon alternatively. The tenor takes the role of triplum in the texture; the two trumpets hocket, while the rest produce the complex sound of the wayward bell ringing on its buoy out at sea.

The bells in *Dinah and Nick's Love Song*, as might be expected, are wedding bells; while three identical melody instruments play the tune, a harp provides a short, repeated 'change'. It is a simple piece in lied form (ABCA), each section punctuated by two harp chords which bend the organum intervals of fourth, fifth and octave to produce characteristic Birtwistle harmonies. Within each section the players are given a certain amount of freedom: the melody instruments are permitted to enter in their own time, to slow down independently, and, in the third section, to take one of a number of possible 'courses' the composer offers. The choice of melody instruments is also free, and the interesting thing here is that, whether they transpose or not, they are to play the music as written; this means that the harmonic relation between the harp and melody instruments will vary according to the choice made. The reason for the inclusion of these free elements again lies in Birtwistle's hatred of goal-orientating procedures; he prefers to go over the same ground again and again but always in a different way. In his introduction to *Silbury Air*, the most substantial score in the present batch, he talks about his musical ideas being 'static blocks' or 'objects', which he looks at from a variety of angles. Not only may he cover the same area taking different routes, as it were, he may also present various versions of the material simultaneously.

'*Silbury Air*', he says, 'is named after Silbury Hill, a prehistoric mound in Wiltshire, the biggest artificial mound in Europe.' Seen from a distance it 'presents itself as an artificial but organic intruder of [sic] the landscape'. This is also how he views the music he composes. It may seem to be organic in that, as often as not, it grows from a seed consisting of a semitone shift and a trochee, but essentially it is an artefact put together by a combination of logic and chance. Basically he is an inventor; he does not compose intuitively. In his opinion, to compose intuitively would only lead to clichés, and what he wants is magic.

The score is prefaced with a 'pulse labyrinth', a table or map of possible routes that the process of going through the same event might take. Birtwistle's attitude to pulse is unique. In his early music he organised his rhythms additively in the main, but when he embarked on his opera *Punch and Judy* in 1964 he felt that, without reference to a regular pulse, he would not be able to time the dramatic action effectively. He therefore began a series of experiments with pulse, sometimes, as in *Ring a Dumb Carillon* and *Tragoedia* (both 1965), combining it with additive rhythms, sometimes laying one velocity on another or presenting them in sequence, as later he did in *Chronometer* (1971), a tape piece that deals exclusively with the mechanisms of clocks—ticks, the whirring of clockwork, the chiming of bells. The pulse labyrinth merely co-ordinates the velocities. It was the experimenting with pulse that led him to bells, for a bell may be rung regularly like a pulse or be set in motion by wind, sea, or ground swell and toll as haphazardly as an additive rhythm might sound.

Birtwistle calls *Silbury Air* 'a compound artificial landscape or "imaginary landscape" to use Paul Klee's title'. *Carmen Arcadia mechanicae perpetuum* is also a Klee title, for it is none other than an ironic translation of the title of the picture depicting a clockwork singing bird, *The Twittering Machine*. Like *Silbury Air* it is scored for a group of seven wind instruments, a group of five strings and a group of punctuating instruments (piano, harp, percussion) here reduced from four to two. Birtwistle is deeply influenced by Klee: the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, diaries and notebooks, as well as the paintings, constantly provide him with ideas. Klee, he claims, creates magic. He does so by devising an extremely coherent design then disrupting it with something irrational, a flight of whimsy perhaps. Birtwistle proceeds likewise, except that he avoids whimsy. He invents patterns that conform to what he calls 'a vigorous invented logic', but within each pattern he includes an element of pure chance, an element which, as often as not, comes from a set of random numbers generated by a computer. Intuition could never arrive at the results achieved—they appear as if by magic. It is for this reason that Birtwistle's music is impossible to analyse in precise detail. One can never trace his processes back to source, and so his scores will always remain something of an enigma.

Carmen Arcadia mechanicae perpetuum (one must resist the temptation to abbreviate the title) 'consists of six musical mechanisms which are juxtaposed many times without any form of transition'. Dynamics and registration exist on a time scale independent of the mechanisms and consequently have 'a life of their own'. To produce fortuitous elements Birtwistle does not depend solely on a computer. There are essential as well as operational uncertainties. Essential uncertainties occur when two totally independent chains of events coincide, which is what happens not only here but also in *Silbury Air* and many another piece by Birtwistle. Patterns of pitch, durations, attacks, dynamics, and register are invented, each perfectly logically, but when they intersect they produce 'absolute coincidences'. This is what occurs when *talea* and *color* intersect in isorhythm.

Of particular interest, however, is the fact that Birtwistle juxtaposes these mechanisms 'without any form of transition'. One is reminded of what William Empson had to say in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* about the poetic use of language. When a reader encounters a short poem consisting of two seemingly unrelated statements it is he who must supply the connection. 'He will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his own mind.' In other words, the reader must bridge the semantic gap, but without the gap there would be no poetry. This is the essential ambiguity and it is the nub of Birtwistle. He makes the listener work. Music, for him, is an activity.

We have been given Birtwistle in such good measure that it may seem greedy to ask for more. What is wanted, however, is not another new publication but corrections to old ones. I am thinking, in particular, of the misprints in *Précis* (1960). The question of accuracy, whether it be of text or performance, is a difficult one in Birtwistle's case, for as well as building into his system essential and operational uncertainties, he also includes mistakes. A copying error, a misprint, or a mistake in performance could well delight him—doubtless the odd mistake in the present batch of scores is acceptable. But there are limits; there are always limits in Birtwistle. In *Précis* there are far too many wrong notes. The logic is not merely bent, it is destroyed.

Were they to be corrected in a new edition (and this means recovering the original manuscript from wherever it is), pianists might play the piece. Lack of performances is not, however, a fate likely to overcome the works reviewed here. In every way they are too authoritative.

David Roberts Arts Lab Scores

- Lyell Cresswell, *Drones IV*, for tuba (Birmingham: Arts Lab Music Publishing, c1977)
 Simon Emmerson, *Variations*, for tuba (c1977)
 T. J. Endrich, *Steps*, for clarinet and soprano (c1979)
 Keith Gifford, *Momentella*, for clarinet (c1978)
 Richard Orton, *Ambience*, for bass trombone and tape (c1977)
 —, *Concert Musics 1 to 7* (c1978)
 —, *Mug Grunt* (c1978)
 —, *Piece de résistance*, for piano (c1978)
 —, *Sawlo Seed (Alchemusic for Voices)* (c1979)
 Melvyn Poore, *Vox superius*, for tuba (c1977)
 John Schneider, *TBA*, for solo bass instrument (c1978)
 Tim Souster, *Heavy Reductions*, for tuba and tape (c1978)
 —, *Quints Jam*, for four sliding instruments and two dual-trace oscilloscopes (c1979)
 Jan Steele, *All Day*, for voice and piano (c1978)
 Trevor Wishart, *Polysaccharides*, for eight clarinets (c1979)
 —, *Tuba mirum*, for prepared tuba, electrically operated audio-visual mutes, tape, and lighting (n.d.)

available from Arts Lab Music, Holt Street, Birmingham B7 4BA

A review of scores from Birmingham Arts Laboratory has been rather slow to find its way into print in *Contact*, and as may be seen from the publication dates listed above, after an initial flurry of scores following the launching of their publishing project in 1977,¹ the flow dried up. I hope that Arts Lab Music has merely entered a period of dormancy and has not suffered a premature extinction, for it has brought forward a group of works slightly out of the ordinary and presented them in a variety of attractive formats. The scores are mostly loose leaf, and different shapes, sizes, and colours, with decorations or illustrations, some humorous; they are not bound in covers but come in large brown envelopes. The bundle of scores under review is rather diverse and my discussion is uneven: the amount of space I give to each does not necessarily correlate with quality.

The main shaping force on the content of the Arts Lab Music catalogue was Melvyn Poore, tuba player, composer, and former director of music at Birmingham Arts Lab. He has encouraged the production of new music for the tuba and six of the scores were written for the instrument. Poore has developed a variety of extended playing techniques and these are called on frequently in this group of compositions. His own *Vox superius* (1976) makes effective use of a large complement of techniques, including, as the title hints, singing while playing to produce chords. (And quite respectable chords too—not like nasty woodwind multiphonics.) Simon Emmerson's *Variations* (1976) employ the same effect plus breath

tones, microtonal inflections, key clicks, and both key and lip trills; durations in the piece are not firmly fixed but are governed by the player's breath and articulative capacities. Lyell Cresswell's *Drones IV* (1977) contains the curiously vague direction 'Any high pitched drone may be used and it continues throughout the piece. It should begin and end as loudly as possible, but loudness may be varied ad lib. during the rest of the work.' The tuba part consists of fragments and requires singing while playing, instrumental growling on pedal notes while growling vocally, and so on.

TBA (1976) by John Schneider is dedicated to Melvyn Poore, but we are told in a rather mischievous note that the title has nothing to do with tubas at all, but stands for 'To Be Arranged', and that the piece may be played by any bass instrument. This being the case, extended techniques are (perhaps mercifully) more or less out of the question for once, and *TBA* relies on shape rather than colour (though, possibly to compensate, the score is printed on violent yellow paper). The work consists of 36 modules, each of which lasts no more than a few seconds and presents a unified musical character, such as all *staccato* notes with an emphasis on repetition of minor seconds, or wide-ranging *legato* phrases mostly of four or five notes. These modules are arranged as a 6×6 matrix through which the performer is free to move under certain restraints. The modular arrangement aside, the only notational novelty is the graphic indication of dynamics on a five-line stave, which seems both a precise and an intuitive way of representing nuances.

A simple music-theatre element is introduced in Tim Souster's *Heavy Reductions* for tuba and tape (1977). The performance begins with the concert hall in darkness. Sounds of water are heard from the tape. A murky green 'underwater' light fades up to reveal the tuba player, who reads (in English) the opening stage directions of *Das Rheingold*. The tubist then begins to play a harmonic skeleton of the prelude to the opera and is joined after a short interval by the tape, which simulates a simple time-delay system, so that it plays in continual canon with the instrument. Occasionally the player breaks off to read further stage directions. The ten-minute piece ends as it began with the sounds of water. An elegant idea that should please all fans of E flat major.

The dramatic element in Trevor Wishart's powerful and impressive *Tuba mirum* (1978) is far more elaborate. A prisoner in a 'psychiatric hospital' makes a variety of experiments with a tuba. At first these are bizarre and aimless, but gradually hints of clarity and coherence emerge, until there comes a culminating moment of beauty and self-realisation. In the end, though, the prisoner is liquidated by three silent and anonymous doctors-cum-bureaucrats, whom we have seen discussing his case throughout. I have nothing but admiration for Wishart's willingness to do for himself any job that needs doing: he invents the scenario, composes the music, prepares the taped material, builds the props and scenery, constructs the modifications to the tuba (racks to hold motor horns, duck calls, train whistles, fairy lights, and so on), builds three new types of tuba mute, designs and makes the electronic gadgetry, and draws the score, which includes exhaustive instructions for staging. The musical notation is complex, for rather than give a fully determinate series of instructions to the soloist, Wishart provides a network of signs that indicate repertoires of elements, the mix between elements, and the transformations that are to be worked on them. Consequently the work must be extraordinarily demanding in its calls on the player's commitment, as well as

on his technique and acting ability.

The other item by Trevor Wishart, *Polysaccharides* for eight clarinets (1969), looks pretty much as you'd expect a piece for eight clarinets to look—after all, you wouldn't use that combination unless you wanted a fairly homogeneous effect. It's a relatively early piece, lacking the music-theatre elements that one normally associates with the composer, but it would be intriguing to hear. A group of good amateurs should be able to manage it. *Momentella* for solo clarinet (1977) by Keith Gifford is another piece that should present no very great difficulties to a clarinettist with a modestly extended technique: it's a well-constructed though rather slight piece in eight short sections. (The score is a rather depressing blue.)

I've always thought of myself as a pretty averagely sympathetic sort of fellow, but pieces like Tom Endrich's *Steps* for clarinet and soprano (1976) bring out the Goth and the Vandal in me: its sensitivity is just a bit more than I can take. When I read that the piece is 'dramatically concerned with the subtle appearance of such qualities as beauty, longing, and response, and their placement within the context of existence—varyingly fluid, stable, rich, and empty', I begin to see the virtues of such musical phenomena as Deep Purple or Motorhead. All this is, of course, terribly unfair on Dr Endrich, who has talent, and a good feel for musical contour, but in the old days one would have prescribed a stiff course in fugue.

Jan Steele is another composer who has worked at Birmingham Arts Lab. His *All Day*, for voice and piano (1972), a setting of a James Joyce poem, appeared in an orchestrated version on a record on the Obscure

label. The note to the score makes suggestions as to how this haunting, much transmogrified twelve-bar blues could be realised for ensemble.

Tim Souster has a marked fondness for giving polyvalent names to his works, but even by his own standards the title *Quints Jam* (1971, rev. 1973, 1976) contains a screamingly awful pun. The piece is for four 'sliding' instruments (sine-wave generators are recommended) and two dual-trace oscilloscopes. It consists of about a quarter of an hour of very slow *glissandi* from fifths (i.e. quints) to unisons and vice versa. The score looks as if a performance would be interesting, but it's extraordinarily difficult to tell for sure.

Over the years I have heard many complimentary reports of the music of Richard Orton, who teaches at York University, but have never encountered it in the flesh. So it's good to see Arts Lab Music bring out a group of five works by this composer. *Mug Grunt* (1972) is a music-theatre piece for three male performers with large mugs. They sit facing the audience and make various stylised movements of their heads and mug arms to the accompaniment of grunts and other indistinct vocal sounds. All this is to be done according to a rigorously notated score, which must be memorised by the performers, and requires nothing less than a *tour de force* of co-ordination between the three parts. Both the idea and its execution seem very appealing. It is less easy to weigh up *Ambience* for bass trombone and tape (1975) without actually having heard the tape. The composition is dedicated to Jim Fulkerson, who gave it its first performance in the Wigmore Hall on 17 May 1975.

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Pièce de résistance for piano solo (1969), dedicated to Richard Bernas, maintains until the very end a constant rocking motif in 3+3+2/8, which is transformed very slowly by passing through different tonal and near-tonal chord progressions. As with any repetitive music, such a description scarcely does the composition justice, for all kinds of unexpected psychoacoustic by-products are liable to emerge in performance. *Sawlo Seed* for voice or a group of voices (1972) arose out of Orton's experiments in forming symbols from the superposition of typewriter characters. The new symbols created are interestingly intricate and ambiguous; they may be seen as things in themselves or decomposed into their constituents. Using his overlay technique, Orton took two texts—one from James Joyce, the other from Edgar Allan Poe—and superposed them letter-for-letter and then grouped the resulting characters into 'words' according to a news item in the *Daily Telegraph*. The six pages of the score present the text in successive stages of magnification, so that whereas on the first page there are 83 'words', on the last the same space is occupied by a single character. At the foot of each page there appears a sequence of chords to which the accompanying text is to be sung. Any portion of the text from a single 'word' to the whole thing may be chanted one or more times. 'Above all, allow the phonetic implications and possibilities of the portion of the text being used to suggest a strange new phonic language; enter into this language fully and allow the language to express yourself.' This seems to me a good piece of experimental music, for it holds the rational and irrational in an interesting balance and presents what I find an intriguing challenge as to how to turn it into sonic reality.

By contrast, *Concert Musics 1-7*, a group of text pieces, seem to me to lack the vital spark that provokes or charms the performers to make an imaginative leap into musical activities of which they were previously unaware that they were capable. Asking performers to produce a 'continuous or rapidly repeating sound' (*Concert Music 1*) for several minutes scarcely offers such a stimulus. A text piece ought to be an invitation that the performers will wish to accept, rather than an instruction that they must obey: George Brecht, La Monte Young, Cardew, Stockhausen, and Christian Wolff have managed to offer such an irresistible invitation. To see what can be done with a one-line score, compare the rather tame *Concert Music 2*—'Play no note intentionally'—with a masterpiece among verbal scores, La Monte Young's 'Some of them were very old grasshoppers'.

¹ See Melvyn Poore, 'Report on Birmingham Arts Lab Music (September 1977)', *Contact 18* (Winter 1977-8), pp.45-6.

Hilary Bracefield

Gaudeamus Music Week 1982

International Gaudeamus Music Week, Holland,
3-12 September 1982

It is six years since *Contact* had a representative at the Gaudeamus 20th-century music festival in Holland, so it was with pleasurable anticipation that I accepted an invitation from the Gaudeamus Foundation to attend the 1982 event. I knew, of course, that I could never hope to write such a witty report as Dick Witts did (sorry about the pun),¹ but I was as curious as he was to see just what this Week provided. It is, after all, one of the most venerable contemporary music festivals—it was begun in 1947—but though it is as close as any in Europe to British musicians, it does not seem to attract them in great numbers.

The 1982 Week saw the Foundation in the middle of some reorganisation, and future events could very well present more attractive music making for the visitor. The Gaudeamus Foundation still exists, as its publicity states, 'to promote and propagate new music in general and the music of young composers up to 35 years of age in particular', and the backbone of the September Week is still a competition for composers under 35. But the constitution of the board of directors has changed. The indomitable Walter Maas has now retired, though happily he is still around and about, and since 1979 the competition has existed without monetary prizes. The composers of selected works are offered a trip to the festival, during which they attend rehearsals and hear their works played in a public concert; the hope is that the new pieces will enter the repertory of the performers. Instead of accepting compositions of any kind, the directors every year list certain categories, which supposedly correspond to soloists or groups versed in playing 20th-century music.

The composers selected in 1982 did not appear to be upset that no cash prizes were handed over; young composers are glad enough to receive performances. They seemed to enjoy and benefit from the week of fellowship with other composers from all over the world. But there are still some problems with the system. One is that the categories remain very wide-ranging, and in fact include a 'free choice', though a work selected in this category is not guaranteed performance. Another is that some of the works selected this year were very slight and did not give performers, promoters or critics much idea of the composer's worth. This could be a fault of the judges. But since this time there were 140 entries in ten categories and they were judged, without (apparently) any preliminary reading, in only two days, it must certainly have been hard to choose wisely. Anyway, the interesting panel consisted of Isang Yun, Brian Ferneyhough, François-Bernard Mâche, and Joep Straesser. Some selections obviously mirrored judges' preferences, or even favoured their pupils, but I see this as no great problem as long as the works are worthy and the judges change each year. None of this year's lot, incidentally, took the opportunity to come and hear their choices.

Until 1982 the Music Week was always based in the Foundation's headquarters in inaccessible Bilthoven,

though concerts were held in other parts of the country. One excellent change that has been made is to move the base for the Week to Amsterdam. This has come about partly because of the rethinking of Gaudefamus policy in the last three years, partly because of the appointment in 1981 of an energetic young organiser Henk Heuvelmans, and partly because the library and information services of the Foundation have been moved to new premises in De IJsbreker in Amsterdam.

De IJsbreker (yes, it does mean 'the icebreaker') is an old-established café-bar by the side of the Amstel River, a short walk out of the centre of town and not far from the museum district. It was recently acquired by Jan Woolf, horn player with De Volharding and the ASKO Ensemble, and has become a favourite meeting place for people interested in contemporary music. The spacious room behind the café has been converted into a concert hall seating 220. It was to have been completed for the Music Week but, as is the way of all such things, it was still being finished around us. Simply furnished, with raked auditorium and hi-tech furnishings, it is reminiscent of, though smaller than, London's ICA theatre. There is also space in the building for the Gaudefamus library, a dance studio and offices for a number of other organisations which are thinking of moving into the centre. So while the Bimhuis is still the place to go to in Amsterdam for jazz, call in at De IJsbreker, Weesperzijde 23, to find out what is going on in the new music world.

The removal of the Gaudefamus Music Week and the Foundation's library to Amsterdam is the best fillip Gaudefamus has received in years, so while not everything went smoothly this time, the festival could take a much more important place in metropolitan Holland's musical life in the future.

Three final points about the Week's organisation before I get to the music. To replace the 'consultations' of the composers with each other and the resident judges that were a feature of the old régime in Bilthoven, so-called 'composers' presentations' were offered. In a festival with a captive international presence and, one hopes, growing local interest, this sort of thing is essential to provide a forum for the visiting composers and a springboard for public and private discussion and argument. (De IJsbreker is ideal for this, of course, because of the adjacent café—good light food all day and evening, and a bar with marvellous opening hours.) The 'presentations' were valuable because they fleshed out the little we heard in the concerts of some of the composers' music, and I was pleased that most had brought tapes and scores as well. But we had some marathon sessions. Firm chairmanship, a time limit on the composers, and an organised translation service are needed for 1983.

Another innovation this time was an evening of electroacoustic music, selected from the Bourges Festival a couple of months earlier. It was well worth while and deserves to become an institution.

Lastly, there is a useful part of the festival, occupying the earlier days, during the prize-winners' rehearsal time. Music from different European countries has been featured in this spot each year since 1976. Poland was the choice this time, but unfortunately arrangements faltered, so instead we had four concerts of new music from Holland. Despite what we think, Dutch contemporary music doesn't get as frequent an airing as it seems to, and young composers, particularly, benefited from an opportunity to submit works for an orchestral and a choral concert.

Well, what we had over the ten days were 43 works,

with 18 world premières and seven first performances in Holland. Nearly all the works were written in the last three or four years. This may look like the typical contemporary music festival overkill, but with no more than two concerts a day and a welcome gap mid-week it wasn't fatal. The Gaudefamus tradition of programming concerts in several venues and centres continues, and good audiences assembled in The Hague, Hilversum (a live broadcast), Utrecht, and Haarlem, as well as Amsterdam. De IJsbreker doesn't hold a huge number, but it was good to be in an auditorium packed to the doors. Chamber music was also heard in a concert room in the Stedelijk Museum (surroundings good if sight-lines weren't), and an orchestral concert was given in a grubby but atmospheric converted church, renamed the 'Paradiso' and used more often as a pop concert venue.

To get to the music. *Contact* reviews being written, usually, at some remove from the event, it is interesting to see what remains in the mind after a few weeks. The 18 selected works were a pretty mixed bag, and I can't honestly say that any of them had me wishing to proclaim a genius. All the problems of competitive selection of previously unperformed works by young composers came to the fore in the first concert of music by the winners—the broadcast orchestral concert by the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Ed Spanjaard; the four chosen suffered from an indifferent orchestra, insufficient rehearsal time, and the problems of their own writing for the medium.

A conventional orchestra responds best to the familiar, which is why *Cantares*, a monodrama by Todd Brief (b. USA, 1953) on a fashionable text by Pablo Neruda, superbly sung by Young Hee-Kim, got the most understanding performance; I found it absolutely competent, but its ripe, overblown, Richard Straussian vein repelled me. Dariush Dolatshahi (b. Iran, 1947) tries in *Enekus*, as in all his work, to mesh his Western musical upbringing with his knowledge of Persian music. A thoughtful and talented musician—in some ways the most interesting at the festival—he balances a Persian modal system against conventional Western orchestral patterning in this work. It should have made a greater impact, but the forces were arranged more suitably for broadcasting than for listening in the hall. Neither *Ceng die* by Man Yee Lam (b. Hong Kong, 1950) nor *Poème: couleurs de spectre* by Stephen Reeve (b. Great Britain, 1948) received sympathetic performance, and it is hard to tell how far the problems were inherent in the scores. Man Yee Lam, a Ferneyhough pupil, here applies serial techniques in a work first conceived for Chinese orchestra, and Reeve has invented his own system of creating compositional material based on relationships between the colours of the spectrum. Neither work, as we heard it, achieved satisfactory musical results.

In an afternoon concert in the Stedelijk Museum, four string quartets were played with steely efficiency, and with scarcely a breathing-space between them, by the Gaudefamus Quartet, who seemed to want to get a necessary but distasteful task over within an hour. It was daunting to have to sit and listen, for all the works were similar enough to merge into one another, ending up like one mad amalgam of mid-20th-century cerebral music making. The trouble was that *Ictus* by Jean-Baptiste Devillers (b. France, 1953) out-intellectualised all the others; it was the only work to challenge the players with some original and rebarbative, but always musical, writing. I had to admire it. The other three works were all by more lyrical Italians: *Tetrarco* (Franco Balliana, b. 1952),

Per accordar (Ivan Fedele, b. 1953), and *Nuances* (Piero Papini). Note the titles: guess the contents! It was pleasant, incidentally, to emerge from the concert and rest in front of Brian Eno's video film *Mistaken Memories of Medieval New York*, with its cool music, on display in another room.

The Gaudeamus Quartet returned in the final concert of the festival to perform, again with grim meticulousness, a set of string quartets by Daniel Brožák (b. Czechoslovakia, 1947). I wavered between thinking of the system behind these works first as a joke, then as a serious return to the Romantic quartets of Dvořák or Smetana, then as a delusion. Brožák seems absolutely certain that his 'interval keys' are the way forward, and will sell you a copy of the computer print-out of the chord series. But while one of *The Seasons* might suggest that the system works, the sameness of all four when played together (which is not, apparently, intended by the composer), made one realise that a system does not necessarily produce music, only simulate it.

The ASKO and Delta Ensembles and various soloists dealt sympathetically with the rest of the winning works, though the use of Conservatorium students for some, while admirable, was not completely successful. I gather that Holland faces the same old problem of having to drag most music students anywhere near contemporary music. Two works stood out: *Oh Paraman sepolta sotto il pino* by Fabio Nieder (b. Italy, 1957) and *Jeux de société* by Denys Bouliane (b. Canada, 1955). On the evidence of his 'presentation' and this work, Nieder, together with Devillers and Dolatshahi, stands out as a composer to be watched. *Oh Paraman* for soprano, violin, and percussion, is a setting of four tiny songs from the Trobriand Islands, which uses densely organised serial music to produce a spare and beautiful sound. Despite a frisson of horror at those Trobriand Islanders popping up outside the sociological field where they belong, the piece held me. *Jeux de société*, with more than a tinge of sociological import, didn't work completely, but thank goodness for a piece with humour. Bouliane will talk volubly to anyone who will listen about the philosophical and sociological bases of his music, but take away this verbiage and one is still left with a witty social comment in musical terms through his pieces about hide and seek, telephoning, poker, and gossip. The players obviously enjoyed themselves, too.

The other chamber works were a brass sextet by Giuseppe Colardo (b. Italy, 1953), *Passaggio* for solo oboe by Ivan Fedele, *Piece in Glissando* for solo harp by the Romanian Vincentiu-Christian Coban, *Sambúdarsundurthykkja* for horn, harpsichord, and tape by Lárus Jálldor Grimsson (b. Iceland, 1954), and two works for the ASKO Ensemble—*Gasso* by Tetsuya Omura (b. Japan, 1951) and *Bagamoyo* by Ada Gentile (b. Italy, 1947). All these composers are potentially more interesting than the works that were played suggested. But I positively disliked Grimsson's pretentiousness.

The trouble with a festival is, I suppose, that it is inclined to be rather middle-of-the-roadish. The more unusual composers probably don't even bother to enter, so the competition works produce nothing startling. The preoccupations on show at the Music Week were manipulations of total serialism, private systems of the composers' own, or attempts at East-West synthesis.

Here and there, however, there were a few different moments. Minimalism in any form surfaced only in a quiet and pleasant chamber choir work by Andy Pape (b. USA, 1955), whose compositional techniques were deeply enough submerged,

perhaps, to escape the judges' notice. Music theatre appeared only briefly, in *Jeux de société*, and apart from that piece of Bouliane's, humour was used intentionally only in black form, in the prize-winning tape piece from Bourges, *Mr Frankenstein's Babies* by Klaus Röder (b. Germany, 1948). The other Bourges selections were deadly serious. It was good to meet a young Uruguayan composer Fernando Condon (b. 1955) on his first visit to Europe with an interesting tape piece, *Suiana wanka*, based on the very successful score he wrote for Peter Shaffer's play *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

Another different moment was the experience of returning to De IJsbreker one night after a very traditional concert of Dutch music and hearing De Volharding playing Nina Rota's music for 8½ inside. And a breath of fresh air came with some improvised music by the Netherlands Clarinet Quartet in a late-night concert. They reminded us of all the other kinds of music going on.

In truth, though, the festival's offerings of Dutch music were rather depressingly mainstream. Most of them either trundled along a programmatic path of semi-Romanticism or tiptoed through patches of carefully worked total serialism: 20th-century music for audiences who don't like 20th-century music, and who end up patting themselves on the back for bearing up better than they expected.

Of the new Dutch works I would have taken the Concerto for two pianos and orchestra by Robert Nasveld (b. 1955) as a joke on the Romantic concerto, had it not been that the composer appeared perfectly serious about it. Chiel Meijering (b. 1954), however, based his *The End of a Specimen* (i.e. Man) on so outrageous a programme (spelled out for us in the composer's notes), and used the full orchestra so self-indulgently, that one was prepared to cheer such a Berlioz-like figure. Paul de Roo (b. 1957) deserved a clap for pursuing a homage to Webern, called appropriately *Für Anton*, in suitably spare terms, and Jan van Roosendaal's *Facets* was well engineered. At 22, he was one of the youngest composers on show.

These young composers were lucky enough to receive two performances of their works by the Netherlands Ballet Orchestra (Ed Spanjaard again conducting), one of the few ensembles that did appear to be enjoying the experience. The Netherlands Chamber Choir under Marinus Voorberg, on the other hand, were ill at ease and possibly even under-rehearsed in a programme of new choral works. Ton de Leeuw's *Car nos vignes sont en fleur*, receiving its Dutch première, was, I think, a better work than this performance suggested.

Of all the Dutch music, I was impressed most, as I have been before, by the work of Peter-Jan Wagemans (b. 1952), whose *Cantata* was given its first performance, and whose earlier *Muziek II* was also heard. He is not afraid to delve into the past for ideas—medieval and Renaissance in both these works—but what comes out is fresh and original, compelling and persuasive. An important talent, I think.

Altogether, though, this wasn't a vintage year for music, but I enjoyed the experience, and would certainly recommend the Gaudeamus Music Week for a visit.² Composers should also think seriously of sending in a work for competition: for those chosen, the discussions and events are an invaluable way of widening what is normally such a solitary existence.

¹ *Contact 16* (Spring 1977), pp.25-8.

² The addresss of the Foundation for further information is Stichting Gaudeamus, PO Box 30, 3720 AA Bilthoven, The Netherlands.

Material Received

Periodicals

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Antonio Bibalo, *Symphony no.2* (1978-9) (Hansen)
Gilberto Bosco, *Berceuse*, for flute, piano, and guitar (1981) (Suvini Zerboni)
—, *Serenata*, for harpsichord and 5 instruments (1978) (Suvini Zerboni)
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—, *Trittico: solo-duo-solo*, for clarinet and viola (1980) (Suvini Zerboni)
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Henri Pousseur, *Flexions*, for cello (1980) (Suvini Zerboni)
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Marco Tutino, *Andrea o I ricongiunti: sinfonia per orchestra* (1980) (Suvini Zerboni)
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Peter Lawson, piano—Oliver Knussen, *Sonya's Lullaby*; Robert Sherlaw Johnson, *Sonata no.3*; Elisabeth Lutyens, *Ring of Bone*; Edward Cowie, *Kelly Variations*; Geoffrey Poole, *Ten* (North West Arts ECR 001)
Nigel Osborne, *Flute Concerto* (unnumbered cassette made by Ballet Rambert, for whose ballet *Apollo Distraught* the concerto has been used)
Michel Waisvisz, *Crackle* (Claxon Records/Free Music Production 77.1/SAJ-14)

Correction

Please note that the author of the book on Xenakis listed in *Contact 25* is Nouritza Matossian.

Contributors to this Issue

Hilary Bracefield Senior Lecturer in Music at Ulster Polytechnic and director of the Mushroom Group which performs experimental and improvised music.

Susan Bradshaw Pianist and writer, specialising in contemporary music.

Gavin Bryars Composer, Head of Music at Leicester Polytechnic, and British Ambassador for the Fondation Erik Satie. He has recently completed an operatic collaboration with Robert Wilson on a version of Euripides' *Medea* and is now working on a large-scale work called *Civil Wars*, again with Wilson, which is to be performed at the Los Angeles Olympics.

Michael Hall Founder of the Northern Sinfonia Orchestra and formerly producer of BBC Invitation Concerts, he is now a lecturer at the University of Sussex and is the author of a forthcoming book on Birtwistle.

Roger Heaton Clarinettist. He is currently completing a PhD thesis on Elliott Carter and is a part-time lecturer in analysis at Goldsmiths' College, University of London.

Robert Frederick Jones Composer, pianist, and lecturer in music at Vanier College, St-Laurent, Quebec. His work for two pianos and tape, *seinn yessit e gledyf ym penn mameu*, has recently been performed in Montreal. He is at present working on a composition for piano solo, a study of the harmonic language of Britten's *Owen Wingrave*, and a textbook, *Elementary Principles of Harmony*.

Peter Phillips Conductor of the Tallis Scholars and lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity College of Music, London. He specialises in Renaissance music and is currently writing a history of English cathedral music. The Tallis Scholars have commissioned, performed, and recorded several works by Tavener.

David Roberts Lecturer in music at the University of Sussex.

Dave Smith He performs with John White, Gavin Bryars, Ben Mason, and the English Gamelan Orchestra. In the last ten years he has visited Albania six times.

Michael Taylor Lecturer in music at Trinity College, Dublin.

John Tilbury Pianist. He is a member of the improvisation group AMM 3 and director of the Eisler Ensemble. He is currently preparing a book on Cardew.

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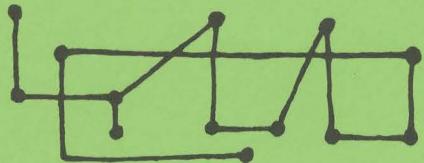
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News from Faber Music

GEORGE BENJAMIN

George Benjamin's latest work, *At First Light*, was a London Sinfonietta commission, first performed under Simon Rattle last year and to be included in the Sinfonietta's November concert at this year's Metz Festival. The Times found it 'a bold piece, reminiscent of Varèse in its eruptive force, and another bolt in this young composer's self-discovery'. Following the success of the German première of *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* at Stuttgart, the Sudwestfunk has commissioned a new orchestral work from Benjamin to be programmed in the 1985 season. *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* continues to attract interest in other parts of the world: performances have been given recently by the Danish Radio Orchestra under Jan Latham Koenig and in Toronto by Andrew Davis and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

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JONATHAN HARVEY

is the only composer whom IRCAM has commissioned twice. The first work, *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* for tape, has been highly successful and is now available on a commercial recording. *Bhakti*, the second commission, scored for 15 players and quadraphonic tape, was launched by the Ensemble Intercontemporain last December. 'Its qualities of imagination' wrote The Times 'are, as usually with Harvey, exciting and beautifully satisfactory to the ear'. The Ensemble perform it again on June 28 at La Rochelle Festival. Harvey is currently completing an orchestral work for the Northern Sinfonia which will be premiered in Newcastle in October this year.

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OLIVER KNUSSEN

Where The Wild Things Are has been taken up by Glyndebourne who will present the first British stage production this Christmas at the National Theatre, London. A tour of this production, together with a new opera, *Higglety, Pigglety, Pop!*, is planned for October 1984. *Higglety, Pigglety, Pop!* is a BBC commission for Glyndebourne and is a Knussen/Sendak collaboration. Both works will feature in the 1985 Glyndebourne season. Knussen received the first Park Lane Group Composer Award in 1982 with his *Songs and a Sea Interlude*, a song cycle from *Where The Wild Things Are*. He has been appointed a director of the Aldeburgh Festival.

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COLIN MATTHEWS

is completing a commission from the Nash Ensemble, *The Great Journey*, for baritone and chamber ensemble which will be toured on the Contemporary Music Network in the autumn of 1983. His *Night Music*, recorded for the BBC by the City of London Sinfonia under Richard Hickox, is to be broadcast in June and repeated in concert later this year. *Divertimento*, which was given a stunning performance on BBC Radio 3 by the Academy of St Martin's, has now been arranged in an alternative version for string orchestra.

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DAVID MATTHEWS

A new work for solo violin, *Winter Journey*, will be premiered on July 3 during the ECO's South Bank concert series by Lorraine McAslan. The first performance of his *Violin Concerto* will be given by Ernst Kovacic with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in Manchester on November 2. The marvellous account of the *Second Symphony* given in a Philharmonia Open Rehearsal under Simon Rattle was recorded and broadcast on March 28. After the première the Guardian described him as 'a real symphonist' and the Sunday Telegraph spoke of 'the ingenious and felt musicality of the score'.

NICHOLAS MAW

The Flute Quartet of 1981 has now been played by the Nash Ensemble all over the world, reaching America on May 17 as part of the 'Britain Salutes America' festival. His recent *String Quartet No 2* was launched at the Barbican by the Gabrieli Quartet on January 13 and will be performed at the Cheltenham Festival on July 12. Its première attracted excellent reviews: 'One of the most rewarding additions to the medium in many a year' (Daily Telegraph); '... his material simply refused to stop singing' (Financial Times). Maw is now working on an opera for Kent Opera.

FLUTE QUARTET Study score £6.00

ROGER SMALLEY

is leading a busy life as composer, pianist and lecturer on the music staff at the University of Western Australia. Two of his pieces for solo instrument and tape delay system have recently been heard in England, *Echo II* for cello played by Melissa Phelps, and *Echo III* for trumpet included by John Wallace in the recent Contemporary Music Network tour. He is now completing *The Long Road to the Great North*, a Fires of London commission for a première in London in November. In May 1985 he will be in England as soloist in a *Piano Concerto* he is writing for the BBC as a commission for European Music Year.

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