Contact

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With effect from the final production work on this issue, two of the editors of *Contact* are relinquishing their positions on the editorial board: Rosemary Roberts, who has been our subeditor and proof-reader for the last three-and-a-half years; and David Roberts, who has been involved in a variety of ways over the eleven-and-a-half years he has spent with the journal. The remaining two editors would like to express their appreciation for all the time and energy they have both devoted to *Contact* during their time with us.

Richard Toop
Brian Ferneyhough in Interview

The following text is the edited and greatly abbreviated transcript of two conversations with Brian Ferneyhough. The first took place at his Freiburg home on 13 October 1983, to the accompaniment of a hungry cat (which attempted at one stage to eat the microphone lead), and a highly vocal (but perfectly safe) budgerigar. The second took place almost two months later in Brussels, on the occasion of a revival of *Firecycle Beta*. The Freiburg interview was concerned mainly with general aesthetic questions, and forms the bulk of the material below; in Brussels most of our conversation revolved around discussion of sketches for *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* and *Superscriptio*, which the composer had kindly placed at my disposal and which form the basis of forthcoming analytical articles. Even here, though, there were various comments of more general interest, which have been interpolated into the Freiburg transcript; moreover, my original questions have often been modified in the interests of clarity and continuity. Parts of this material, along with many other excerpts from our two conversations, were subsequently used in a 'Composer's Portrait' programme for the ABC, Sydney, Australia, broadcast in June 1984.

As the interview progressed, we became enmeshed in a discussion of the German neoromantics, and the relationship between art (for art's sake?) and the 'authenticity of self-revelation' espoused by the neoromantics. This led me to ask:

Authenticity and self-discovery

RICHARD TOOP: Is there an element of self-revelation in *your* work?

BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH: No. I would say that one particular aspect of my work is that I construct myself *through* the work. I am what I am through having gone through the experience of writing the work, and in the same process, the 'glasses' which construct it for me enable me to see that person created (in so far as I produce another work after it).

RT: Does that mean that your works inflect you, rather than you inflecting them?

BF: On the immediately accessible level—the level accessible to me—I would say that was true, yes.

RT: So that the works are not just a voyage of self-discovery, but almost self-definition as well, or self-redefinition?

BF: I would say yes; it's the process of writing which is the vehicle of the self. It's not a matter of going through the journey in order to arrive at a self-revelation of the kind many alchemists or mystics tend to point to, in which the revelation is then an essentially static totality. My view of 'self-consciousness' (or 'self-observatory capacity', in that sense) is an essentially dynamic one—it is always in movement.

RT: Does that mean that when you actually begin to write a work you have certain areas of yourself which you wish to explore through the work, or which you wish to shed light on, and you expect the work to do that?

BF: Yes, that's right. Always. Let's put it this way: there are three things. One: there is this area of myself which I wish to explore. Two: there are areas of the world which have an as yet unexpressed correlate which I sense in myself. Three: it is possible to commence a work without having either of these immediately accessible to me, or not consciously so. But then it is much more difficult to take the first step, because I can't write 'just music'; and besides, in the course of any work of that type, once commenced, the piece inevitably takes on such dimensions at some stage, if it is going to get finished at all. Sometimes I don't finish works for precisely that reason—because they don't find access to whatever it is that needs to be said.

RT: How do you cope with the situation in which the means of your 'self-discovery' are governed by the external circumstances of a commission? For example, can you say to yourself, 'Well, I think it is now legitimate for me to discover myself in terms of a piccolo'?

BF: No. With the exception of one or two pieces in the last year or so, where I have to say that the discovery has had to come as a matter of 'necessity', after having had to do something, I would say that generally I've been in the fairly lucky position of being able to choose my ensembles and players.

RT: If the number of players in an ensemble offers certain 'possibilities of richness', is that more important than the specific nature of the ensemble?

BF: Well, I don't even think of an ensemble in that way. I find it exceptionally difficult to write for 'ensembles' in the normal sense. I never wrote for one before *Carceri d'invenzione I*, and even that has got some weird instruments in it. I couldn't write for what I'd call the 'standard Webern/modern music ensemble'—I just couldn't, not in the normal sense of 'ensemble sound'. My idea of an ensemble is of a totally homogeneous sound-world in which the internal differentiation and articulation of the sounds takes on extra, existential energy and suggestiveness, simply by deviating from the standard grey norm.

RT: But isn't it true that in *Carceri*, especially at the beginning of the piece, you assign very specific tasks to each kind of instrumental grouping?

BF: Oh, this is maintained all the way through! It's deliberately somewhat 'wiped over' (in the Baconian sense) in the middle, so as to produce different trajectories of energy, shall we say. But at the end they do return; and that's because it is part of this cycle, which is again the journey of self-discovery, as it were, or self-investigation, the idea of seeing what for me are the fruitful extremes of the organisation of the external world in order to reveal the inchoate nature of the subjective sensation. Or at the other extreme, what is the value of projecting the inchoate *onto* the material in order that I may be able to see it more clearly in a 'gelled' form, like a bee in amber? How can you preserve this 'organic' in a state of organicity?

RT: Given this general approach to composition, how

can you really go so far, at this moment in time, as to project a cycle of seven works?

BF: Because it's the only way to compose. I'm a slow composer, and I can't conceive of just one work (or then it has to be a big work). Because I have to reflect. It's what I call the 'auto-history' of a work; it's part of the stylistic formative process. A style can only be defined not in terms of the synchronistic elements it contains (at least, not primarily), but far more by the diachronic shadows which those elements in that particular work throw upon the past and future of one's own being. And therefore, for me, if I don't define my activities in terms of, say, a two- or three-year space at least, then there isn't sufficient time for these elements to be auto-revelatory; there isn't time for the history of generative potential to be realised.

Compositional strategies

RT: Are the complex compositional strategies in your music things that you work out well in advance? How much is pre-composition, and how much is spontaneously evolved?

BF: A great deal is spontaneous generation. I think the use of any structure is dual. Firstly, it is to enable one to have a framework within which one can meaningfully work at any given moment, so that one isn't faced with the totality of all possible worlds, under which circumstance one does nothing, probably. Secondly, it presents one with an object to which to react—it is a state of affairs at any given moment, and if you have worked the systems properly then you have left yourself enough freedom to be able to react in a totally individual, and spontaneously significant fashion. Structures for me are not there to produce material; they're there to restrict the situation in which I have to compose, such that material can be spontaneously generated, but still have relationships to the elements around it, so as to produce a totally significant object.

RT: I seem to remember reading an account of your work, at first or second hand, in which you seemed to say that the pre-existent grid of possibilities was almost like a wall you had to bang your head against, a sort of blockage that had to be broken through in order to create. Do you still feel that way, or is that already a partial falsification of your view at an earlier time?

BF: It's a slight falsification of the view in the sense that one doesn't have to break through the wall, because that would imply the wall's being an undifferentiated object. Rather more, I would see two forces at work—and perhaps this is a psychological over-simplification, but nevertheless it enables me to present a convenient counter-case to the Boulezian multiplication idea, which seems to me to be unfortunate. I believe very much that one has an unformed mass of creative volition. On the other hand, in order to realise the creative potential of this volition one needs to have something for it to react against. And therefore I try to set up one or more (usually many more) grids, or sieves, a system of continually moving sieves. This fundamental, undifferentiated mass of volition, of creativity, is necessarily forced to subdivide itself in order to pass. This, when it manifests itself in a composition, gives us as listeners an impression of multiplicity which wasn't, perhaps, present in the original conceptual drive. But, of course, it isn't 'multiplicity': there's no more material than there was before. It's simply that in order to pass these grids of various types and sizes, the material has been forced to diversify itself, to break itself up into more differentiated units which are more immediately apperceivable. This seems to me to be a much more sensible way of producing complexity in a work than simply taking a basic unit and, like the Hall of Mad Mirrors, multiplying it into infinity: one doesn't get any new information that way (or very little); whereas this way one sees what was inside the original block, just like Michelangelo saying that he could see his David in a particular piece of stone.

RT: What was the origin of this whole 'grid' notion?

BF: I think it was basically something that developed slowly. Of course, the key moment is always the one at which you can formalise it verbally, and very many of the musical notations I utilise in preparing sketches for a work are often verbal descriptions of possible processes or states. If you were to look at my basic sketch-books, you would find that they consist almost entirely of writing, rather than musical notation. It's largely verbal conceptualising on the one hand, or pictorial imagery sometimes (less often), philosophical speculation (always relating to the work in hand!), or the simple description—I've a very nice shorthand for it now, which I have developed over the years—of possible musical processes—the way things, whatever they may be, whatever things I choose, might be applied to certain sorts of grids.

RT: You retain your sketches?

BF: I never used to . . .

RT: For any particular purpose?

BF: I earn a certain amount of my livelihood from teaching courses externally—summer courses, but also other courses—and I find sketches are a part of one's livelihood, one needs them! And one of the nice things about reanalysing one's own works in public (not in looking at the analysis in advance—I don't like doing that, I like to be spontaneous—but in standing up and actually starting talking about it) is that one sometimes invents new things, quite spontaneously, by making an imaginary example on the blackboard; I sometimes think, 'By God, this is interesting!' Because I never use examples from the pieces to describe the processes; I always say, 'This is what I might have done, but didn't', mainly because I don't want to simply reproduce what I have done already.

RT: Again, this is the same thing as your forgetting what you had done, and therefore simply recomposing another way of getting to the same thing.

BF: That's right. One of my basic psychological problems in life, I suppose, is that I have a very short-term memory, so that if I now presented to you some very long, tortuous, and complicated argument in response to some question of yours, and you were to interrupt me and say, 'Oh look, I didn't understand that, could you repeat that?', I guarantee I could not.

RT: One would just have to start again?

BF: I am forced to reinvent, let's say, a new formulation for the same argument every time, simply because I'm not capable of retaining a train of thought for long enough. And that probably also has something to do with my musical creativity, why it takes me so long to create a work, why I write very slowly, but also the particular sort of expression and jumpiness, quirkiness that the works themselves consist of.

RT: What is your working method? Do you have a regular routine, or is it very much as dictated by circumstance?

BF: Well, generally I try to keep office hours: it's something I'd recommend to all students. I start at 9 in the morning (sometimes earlier, at 7 or 8) and I go on, all other things being equal, until about 12 or 12.30; I stop (if possible I have a sleep), and then I restart around 3 or 3.30, and then I go on to 6.30 or 7. And on ideal days I get seven or eight hours' work done in this fashion.

RT: And do you find yourself at the beginning of each day really having to reinvent where you'd got to, or do you find that you remember where you were at the end of the previous day?

BF: Well, because my sketches are sometimes incomprehensible, even to me, the day after, because of the short-term memory we were talking about, and because I haven't adequately taken that into account at the end of the previous day's work, it's sometimes very difficult to get back into it. Particularly if, for instance, in a work I've had to leave one layer in order to get on with another layer at a certain moment. Coming back two weeks later to that first layer, it sometimes takes me two or three days to get back into it. However, if I'm in the middle of something, and proceeding with a certain degree of creative dynamism, then usually at the end of a day's work I leave a certain amount of material in a state such that the next morning I can pick it up and go on with a minimum of rethinking, and then I get back into the swing of things fairly quickly.

RT: Is it possible for you to work on more than one piece at once?

BF: Yes, I've always done that.

RT: From preference? Kagel claims that it is essential for him to be working on four or five pieces at once, just to create the necessary level of tension.

BF: Yes, absolutely, because what one work fails to illuminate, another work may well do, and therefore, even though these works may not use the same material, they are very often interrelated in many more subtle ways, which simply working on one piece would have prevented one from achieving.

RT: Does this mean that at any one point there is not so much a specific set of works that you are dealing with, but rather some kind of theoretical central kernel, some kind of conceptual central work, which never actually gets written, but on which all these various pieces you're working on are, in a way, peripheral commentaries?

BF: Certainly not peripheral commentaries! However, there is a certain central kernel, and in one of our previous discussions I tried to define it with the simple word 'style'. I said that many people today make the very simple mistake of equating style with the repertoire of surface elements which a particular work or group of works contains, whereas I would define style far more in terms of continuity in the employment of certain types of material from one work to another. Since today we have a plurivalent society in which very many styles are present simultaneously, it follows, if we don't want to undertake the mad task of trying to recreate *per fiat* one new unified style, each one of us has the task of recreating within the continuity of his own work the semantic richness which a unified style in previous generations allowed to those composers living in them.

Therefore, for me, the essential defining character of style is: how can, through a series of works—also, on a different level, in the development of one work itself—how can these various elements, these means of working, these strategies, be seen to exhibit themselves in different lights, with different potentials for interaction with future works? How can they learn to speak to one another, and to us, in an optimal fashion? There are people who say (and many of them are young composers), 'Today we have the duty to react to the totality of experienced world music; we live in a global society in which Balinese gamelan music, John Cage, and Noh drama are coextant, and the responsible composer, the socially aware composer today, needs to be a virtuoso in playing an organ whose stops consist of all these styles.' I would hesitate to say that this is nonsense, but I think it's a very dangerous ideology, because it means that though the composer is a master of many styles (or not, as the case may be), he is still subservient to them. He treats those styles as 'things', as found objects, whereas I believe that these styles, these types of working, are inextricably bound up with the cultures in which they originated. We can try and appreciate them, and one can, if one wants, adopt some sort of musical attitude towards them; but to employ them as colours, as intellectual colours, as manipulation, to force us into a certain way of feeling, I find this both intellectually and artistically and morally exceedingly suspect.

Therefore a composer today needs, more than ever, to work in one continuously developing style—style as defined in the perhaps circular way I attempted to do so—in order that these elements have a chance to breathe, to expand, to redefine the ambitus within which this style is itself redefining its past and future simultaneously. Because it's the only way, in this situation of a plurality of styles, in which any given work can achieve the semantic richness necessary to make it live up to the demands which the past has quite rightly imposed on us.

The ethical dimension of music

RT: Is there any way of ensuring, at least partially, the aesthetic significance of a work? Is it just a matter of doing the right thing at the right time?

BF: You've got to be musically lucky, I think, but you've also got to be *verbissen*: you've got to be obstinate in the sense that you keep the same high technical quality, make the same aesthetic demands on yourself, even in dry times. You know, Eliot's old man at the fiery gates, waiting for the rain. You've got to be sitting there, waiting for the rain to come. Because if you don't keep the standard up during those dry times (which you can't control) the rain will never come.

RT: You feel you've had dry times yourself?

BF: Oh yes. I've often felt times to be totally meaningless in terms of what I do, living where I do, and looking at the world through the eyes and telescope that I do. I've often thought that I'm sitting on a desert island, in terms of what I think is quality in music. It's something that has disappeared from the scene altogether; the moral responsibility has disappeared from everything. The rats have left the sinking ship, and even the ship has probably sunk. And one of the reasons I say that I'm on a desert island is because most people don't accept the—let's not call it 'moral'—the ethical dimension of a musical work, or any work of art.

RT: How would you distinguish between the two?

BF: For me, 'moral' is a somewhat heavier, more nail-downable term, in the sense that 'moral' has far more of the Adornoesque implication that the work of art can be good or bad, right or wrong. I wouldn't think of

it in those terms, as a contribution to the state of the world at a given time. I'm not one of those composers who is engaged in the banally social[ist] or even fascist notion of a work of art's 'doing good' in the world in general, in the service of this or that social precept.

RT: Rather than 'right or wrong', wouldn't the Adornoists say 'truthful or untruthful'?

BF: Certainly. However, this is a function of the place, the locatable situation of the work in respect of a certain self-regarding quality, or self-perception, that society has at a given time.

RT: They would say that, or you would?

BF: I would too, but it's banal: it doesn't say anything about actual quality. Now let's talk about ethics. I would say that the ethical quality is something that emanates from the composer into the work. That doesn't mean that he is a good or bad guy, something which a 'moral' work, or the production of 'moral' music, tends to imply—moralising! The ethical quality is something which I would describe as remaining work-immanent, something that remains embedded in the quality of the work, without needing to relate to anything else whatsoever. This doesn't put me in the famous *l'art pour l'art* ghetto, or the good old ivory tower. Quite the opposite: the only people who talk about *l'art pour l'art* are those so-called democratic composers who say, 'Yes, let's all individualise our expression, let's all be individuals. But you can't do *that*.'

RT: Is your general aesthetic, and your conviction in the path you are following, generated internally by the work itself, or do you also draw strength from other areas, from the rest of the musical world, from literature, or whatever?

BF: Well, I have to confess that, except from a sense of duty, I don't pay a great deal of attention to what is going on in the world of music at the present time. Over the years I've become intensely depressed by the present development and state of the art, so that apart from odd works by odd composers, which might be quite bad in themselves but contain an interesting point here or there, I really don't get a great deal of stimulation from that. But then that shouldn't be logically necessary if there is any validity in my standpoint that style is a function of development rather than of surface configuration; then, of course, I have to draw future developments from the corpus of evidence already extant in my own work.

I would say that one needs to differentiate this question quite a lot. For instance, you ask: do I draw sustenance from external things, or do I draw it purely from the music, or what? I would say I draw it from the sense of energic stimulus which I feel in myself concerning the state a work has arrived at relative to my total interests at any given time. The work is one thing, and it may be interesting or not; what I am doing otherwise in the world may equally be interesting or not interesting, but it is the way in which these things and the work are both transcended in terms of the excitement, the urge of producing, that for me is the ultimate creative situation.

Expression

RT: Were there any particular influences on your early work?

BF: I would say certainly that my early music was in some way texturally related to the exuberance of the early Boulezian works, but I lost touch with Boulez very, very early, and anything he wrote since 1951 or 1952 has been, to me, of little personal relevance. I say now 'little personal relevance' as a composer; of course, artistically I can have a different estimation of the works in an abstract sense, or a critical sense. But as far as my own creative activity has been concerned, all his theorising has been of zero interest.

RT: So it's really the 'Artaud' period of Boulez that interests you?

BF: Oh yes; it's really what interests me in any composer's work. Unless you've got this absolutely intense identification of expression with the *possibility* of expression (the possibility only exists in realisation, and the intensity of the explosive moment of realisation), then it's a lost cause right from the beginning. I realise that this may be a very limiting and delimited view of art, and I'm quite willing to admit (and I have to, when I'm teaching my pupils and I have to try and enter into their world too) that there may be more 'laid-back' versions of expressive aesthetic effect. I hope I can come to terms with them on their *own* terms. Nevertheless, as far as I'm concerned, the 'too-muchness' of expression which my work deliberately aims at *is* the basic presupposition of creative activity, and one has to live with one's own innate sensations, one's own convictions, without necessarily negating those of others.

RT: Among other things, it's a matter of deliberately setting out to create a labyrinth, rather than a one-way street . . .

BF: Well, I've been called a mannerist composer. I know it was meant as a form of insult at the time, no doubt a learned insult in the eyes of the critics concerned; but in fact if one examines the meaning of the word 'mannerist', I would have to say that most modern art, including people like James Joyce, is mannerist. That is, it works with a 'manner', a conscious stylistic ambitus: style becomes conscious, and not only is the style one uses conscious (in some parodistic work the choice of style is also very conscious), but the actual development of a style within itself, its future possibilities, are also realisable only by conscious reflection on what has already been achieved. And to that extent the labyrinthine is, for me, a very important concept. For instance, I'm very interested in the idea of *ingenio*, the idea of intellectual, playful constructivity—*homo ludens*—confronting head-on, with a massive crash, a great intensity of creative drive: that the creative drive can only find expression as fragment, as (if you like) fragmentary ciphers of this basic, initial explosion. So that's why, in some ways, many processes in my work might be perceived as being fragmentary and inconsequential, precisely because they only find expression after the fact, after the initial unity of expression and structure (which permits the expression) has been dissolved in a flare of energies.

Working methods

RT: In an interview with Joel Bons[1] you say something to the effect that, looking at your scores, you have the impression that you're very good at covering your own traces.

BF: Certainly. And I make no bones about this. The surface can remain the same while the techniques used to generate that surface change. In fact, that is one of the tenets on which my work is based; if it were not so, I would not have that possibility of creating polyvalent or multivalent levels of perception of one and the same image.

RT: Doesn't that put you in something like the situation of Borges' Pierre Menard,[2] rewriting *Don Quixote*? Admittedly the time-span is small, and let's say that you're Cervantes in both cases, but . . .

BF: Well, absolutely. If I take a triplet set of semi-quavers, it is very significant and very important whether this triplet has been generated by some now completed process, so that it has the status of a 'trace of evidence', as it were, of this process (in which case the process itself is the primary interest, and the trace is merely that which leads us to an examination of the processual), or whether this triplet is something pre-defined, something given *as material*. On the one hand it's transparent, on the other it is concretely available to us as evidence in a more direct sense; and by playing between these two extremes, always manipulating the directness of liaison between material presence and processual background (or the sensation of processual background), one is, as you say, working on both levels—one has the original achievement of the book as a cultural artefact, and one has its dematerialisation into the conceptual activity of rewriting it.

RT: In relation to your recent work in particular, how *do* you work, basically? What comes first as the idea for a piece?

BF: I have to say it depends entirely on the piece. Usually I would say that the first sensation, the experience which begins to persuade me that I am actually going to write a piece, is very often a cross between a tactile, a visual, and an aural one. That is, I tend to perceive a mass, almost a tangible sculptural or sculpted mass, in some sort of imagined space, which is made up of these various elements—it might be a certain mass of undifferentiated instrumental colours, it might be a certain register, it might be a certain kind of transformation from one type or state to another, in some way congealed into one momentary experience. That can quite often be allowed to revolve in my mind for some considerable time—it might be a year or 18 months—before it clicks together with whatever else is buzzing around in my mind at the time. Sometimes the title of a work, for instance, comes very early, and many things are hung around that. Nevertheless, I would always say that I would find it difficult to distinguish between the sensibility of intellectual excitement, the feeling of the infinite radiatory potential of a certain idea, be it musical or otherwise, and the immediate sensibility offered by experiencing in my head (already formed, as it were) some sonorous image. I can't distinguish between these two. I think that those composers (or anyone else, for that matter) who attempt to place a limit in principle between the 'bodiliness' of intellectual activity and the 'abstractness' of bodily sensation are themselves guilty of the very sort of intellectual categorisation of which they are accusing other people.

RT: Does that mean that for you composition often involves an element not just of creation but almost of recapturing? And that, just as you were saying earlier that if you forget your way, technically, through a piece, you have to reinvent the means of composing it, so even the first version might also be an attempt to 'reinvent' something which was conceptually 'buzzing around' in this plastic sort of way?

BF: Well, I'm not normally conscious of this: I don't believe music to be that passive. A piece creates itself; it isn't something that you 'draw from life' inside your head, so to speak. On the other hand, I can give you a counter-example, which may or may not be revealing about my work. During various periods of infertility, I have had tremendously vivid dreams. Now these dreams have taken two forms. One has been the imagination of sounds, more or less clearly defined; when I've woken up I've tried to notate them, and they've inevitably been rather banal and obvious, so we'll forget that. Nevertheless, I've also had a kind of dream which has tremendously encouraged me on many occasions. That is, I have found in front of me in this dream a score. Now this score is not by me—not by the 'me' looking at it, anyway (although there are several 'me's, of course, always). Now I open up these scores, and I can see notes, I can see constellations, I can see which instruments or voices are active at any given moment.

And I remember two particular occasions: there was one fantastic piece—it must, I suppose, have been a sort of perverse piano concerto—which reminded me of nothing so much as some sort of crazy Brazilian rain-forest: fruitfulness gone mad in all possible directions—straining towards the sun, or pushing down into the earth in all possible directions to fill out the universe in whatever way possible. And I could really see rhythms, I could see pitches, I could see where instruments related to the piano in particular, and I was tremendously impressed . . . so I wasn't just seeing a vague impression, I was actually seeing fully written notes. The second example was of a piece I still have the project of writing one day—it already has a title—which was about a twelve-page score (perhaps less, perhaps eight or nine only), a very long, tall score, with narrow pages. And it was for large orchestra and large, multiple-voiced choir. All instruments and all voices were performing without a break of more than half a beat's length from beginning to end. Now what was fascinating about this piece was (a) the layering of different types of texture, and (b) the way that the predominantly *pianissimo* means of writing, in spite of everyone playing all the time, allowed for very clear structural distinctions between sections, contrasts between layers, and so on. So that I didn't need to resort to the crude device of stopping people performing in order to make these structural or textural distinctions between sections, but they came through the skilled used of the transformation, distension, compression, and the making clear or more diffuse, of the texture. That, in some ways, was even more impressive than the piano concerto, because it was so much more disciplined, but at the same time, so much more radical.

And I remember waking and being very frustrated on both these occasions at not being able to notate some of the things, because the act of taking a pen or pencil in your hand and trying to notate things already distances you from the experience, and the act of writing already dictates to you in a very strong and physical way what *it* wants to do, and not what the thing you are trying to recreate seems to be. So on the one hand I was rather distressed at not being able to do this; but on the other hand I was tremendously encouraged by the feeling that even at moments of intense . . . almost desperation, shall we say, at not being able to compose, one was creating these complete pieces inside oneself, which had a coherence and unity that was quite staggering. So that even if they were works that would never see the light of day, that were inaccessible to anyone else, it gave me a whole new perspective about what creativity is, about where creativity is located in the human spirit.

RT: Did these dreams ever recur, or were they unique phenomena?

BF: No, they never recurred. No.

RT: And so you would rush to recapture what you could, or would you just sit there and think about them?

BF: After the first experience of trying to write them down, and naturally destroying them even quicker, I decided merely to think about them. And looking at some of my later works, particularly things like *La terre est un homme*, there are passages in that—especially the dense tutti where everyone is playing madly for several bars—where there is a great deal of very shadowy and distant reflection of those scores.

RT: Can you give me a specific example of how a piece came about? Let's say the piano piece *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*: what was your work process, and what phases did the piece go through in terms of planning, and so forth?

BF: First of all, one has to say that the title of the piece is taken from the concept of the *emblema*—or *Denkbilder*, as Walter Benjamin terms them—of the 16th and 17th centuries. They consisted rather of the equivalent of our present-day crosswords for highly learned and literate gentlemen. They consisted of three parts: one was a title, of a rather obscure, surrealistic type, often in Latin, and often with arcane connotations. The second part was the verbal description of a possible picture—*icon*—with various symbolic parts, like the *conjunctio oppositorum*, the male and female, like the dragon emerging from the alchemical egg, like the sun, the moon, and so on, put into various permutative constellations. The third element was always a piece of verse called the *epigram*, in which—again for the learned consciousness—an attempt was made to relate the obscurity of the title to the intense symbolism of the image. So that you have three different dimensions of the same basic area of concern.

In this particular work, my interest revolved around two things, one of which was to make the process of treatment thematic or motivic, therefore replacing material repetition, or the quasi-motivic repetition of given elements. The piece has to start with *some* material, but it could have started with others; I simply wrote down a set of notes without thinking about them at all, and said, I will work with these. That's how the piece begins. And then there is a very strict system of inter-reference, where I can relate back to the initial material, or I can relate back to one of the derivations of the initial material, or to one of the derivations of the derivations. Each of these derivations has between one and 13 different types of transformation attached to it, so that there is a very intense, almost cyclonic whirl of transmutation, of re-perspectivisation, taking place—it's what you might call a 'mobile cubism'.

RT: Can I back-track a moment? Was your knowledge of the whole business of the *emblemata* considerably previous to your writing of the piano piece, or did the knowledge of one suddenly lead almost automatically to the other?

BF: Well, let me start to answer this question by carrying on answering the previous one. The second thing I wanted to say in respect of my immediate concerns in writing that piece was something I mentioned when we were talking earlier: the question of possible explanation of musical materials via musical means. How can one have, as it were, a 'meta-musical' explanation of an extant musical material in that material itself? How can one allow material to distance itself, such that one can see that material in two different ways simultaneously? This concern is something I've lived with for many years. Let us take, for instance, the example of Schoenberg's op.23, the Five Piano Pieces. The first of those piano pieces begins with several bars of intense and, I think, stunningly beautiful three-part writing, which are almost complete in themselves. The moment he then starts moving off into variations of this, moving into more conventional accompanimental piano figurations, and so on, I feel it becomes repetition, irrelevant: in a way, I would have liked him to stop the piece there, at the end of that first tiny exposition.

It seems to me fundamentally wrong to reveal the basic essence of a work, and then multiply it. This is Boulez's idea, and not mine. My idea is to start with the multiplied mass, and gradually through various processes focus down to the given; it seems much more sensible to me, and much more conclusive, much more in keeping with the way the human mind works things out. So this was the basic motivation of this work.

I had first come across the idea of the *emblema* in 1976: it was much later that I realise how obsessed Walter Benjamin was with this entire business,[3] and how his Klee picture, *Angelus novus*, was of such great symbolic importance to him, both to his theories and to his person. So a lot of this had resonances later which were quite accidental, and external to the original idea. It was in Venice, I recall, while I was there for the Biennale. The Biennale still had money in those days, and I was invited for three weeks, as one of several young visiting composers, to live in almost the best hotels, three meals a day, and so forth. I didn't have a great deal to do except advise on the performance of my works, and be there, in the standard Italian fashion. I enjoyed this very much—it was one of the formative influences of my compositional career—and I spent this time consciously trying to compose a piano piece based on this idea, and couldn't. I tried very many approaches to it, many textures, and none of them worked. I then abandoned them—I still have these sketches somewhere, and maybe one day I'll use them, but perhaps I won't—and I left it to accumulate.

Over the years, the detritus of images and partial images associated with my alchemical and metaphysical studies, or Renaissance studies, began to accumulate round a core, and this core was, as I said, the idea of *Denkbilder*: pictures to help you think, or 'thinking pictures'—it's very ambiguous, of course. And I wanted to find a way, both of solving the problem I outlined a moment ago, and of treating time in an immediately palpable, pictorial fashion. So the first part of the piece is this whirlwind of the not-yet-become, the idea of processes, not material, forming the thematic content of the work. So apart from the quite banal initial material, which we don't even know is 'initial material', the whole thing is in a whirlwind of dissolution even before it has been created—very linear.

So this is the *Lemma*, the superscription. The linearity of the material—it's mainly two-part writing—is in some way a sort of half-amused reference to this concept. The second part, the *Icon*, is the description of the possible picture put into actual pictorial form. I'm dealing here with the expansion and contraction of rhythmic and chordal cycles. There are only seven chordal identities, and this middle part is, as it were, the same thing seen from many perspectival standpoints. I have what I call a 'time-sun'. That is, I imagine a framework, a conceptual spatio-temporal framework within which these chords are then disposed on several levels, like objects. Then there is a sun passing over them; the shadows thrown by the sun (the speed at which the

sun moves playing a great role here, of course) are of different lengths, different intensities, impinging in different ways on different objects, themselves also moving upon the space defined by this frame. And the durations of these chords, the way the chords are vertically expanded or compressed at certain points, the type of inversion used, and so on, how many of these different types of treatment are superimposed, what the type of textural treatment of each of these chordal units is, all this is very strictly controlled by this unifying visual concept. So I'm very much relating—if only tangentially, and rather anecdotally —to the concept of visuality, of pictoriality, to the mysterious suggestive pictoriality of this mannerist *concetto*.

The third part is the *Epigram*. This is the attempt to unite these two elements that have appeared previously. It's a failure: I have to say this. But as we were saying earlier, before we started recording, Schoenberg's Second String Quartet is also a failure in this sense, and needs to be a failure, in my eyes, in order to be the historical success which it actually is, and which makes it, for me, a very important composition.

RT: But a failure in what sense? A failure as a piece of music when you hear it, or as the realisation of a concept, or what?

BF: A failure to be a classical string quartet. And by failing to do this, it becomes something else. Now *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* is a failure in the sense that it does not find this *via media* of exegesis in the *Epigram* part. But that for me was also a very important learning experience, which put me onto quite different tracks of speculation that I think are bearing fruit now in this large-scale cycle, where I have, right at the beginning, with a great deal of care, laid out the space within which it is meaningful to look for musical problems.

RT: What 'went wrong' in the *Epigram*?

BF: Well, the idea of what was to happen in *Epigram*, the idea of the entire piece, was to move in exactly the opposite direction to Schoenberg in the first of the op.23 pieces—we were talking about this. One should start out with a diverse phenomenon, and move back towards the kernel of the substance, and this is what *Epigram* was trying to do. It was trying to move away from the seeming discursive polyphony, the motivic polyphony of the work's opening (which in fact is nothing of the sort, but is a total dissolution and disembodiment of material-creating devices, raising technique to the level of thematicism, while the material falls to a demonstrative substratum). Instead, the exact opposite is true; through the course of the piece, I have gradually concentrated material and structure on converging paths. So the idea was that in *Epigram* these two would come together in a much more motivically cogent fashion, such that the listener would feel, 'Aha, the great linear freedom of the first part and the tremendous verticalised icy rigour of the second part, both expressing in their own ways different approaches to time, but equally powerful, have in this final section found some sort of synthesis, moved down towards the essence of the matter.' And in fact at the end of the piece, we find that the very last three bars of the piece bring together the two complementary hexachords of what would have been basic twelve-tone material in a quite absurd manner: it reduces the whole thematic thing down to a basis.

One of the things that make *Epigram* both a failure and a strangely unexpected success for me is that I found that in trying to work it motivically, my compositional desires simply didn't interlock with what I was theoretically setting out to do. After all this research I had carried out over the space of about eight months in producing the piece, I felt that this sort of motivic writing was really not a desirable thing. And one reason why the *Epigram* turned out so short was that at a certain point the material itself *demanded* to be redisposed in schematically block-like entities. There is a convulsive 7/16 bar at the end of page 22, where so many lines of material are crossing that I decided I simply wasn't going to carry out the scheme I had set for myself, that it was pointless to take this sort of material any further. Because in a way it was a personal confirmation for me of my distrust of the motivic-cellular diversification principle. So from that point on, I start bringing back my chords as a sort of prison-bar structure, and between the manifestations of the chords themselves I bring in little fantasies which present the chords in more linear fashion. Then at a certain point I begin breaking up the chords into two hands, so that the two parts of the chord move asynchronously, right in the middle of the keyboard. And this, I think, builds up a tremendous power, because the hands are trying to disengage themselves from one another, and never quite make it, because they are pulled back in again. And for me, this last part of the piece demonstrates quite well both the ultimate creative absurdity of the thematic-motivic foundations I was trying to investigate, and also the power generated by the conflict between that desire and the things that the actual material itself wanted.

RT: Wouldn't it almost have distressed you, in fact, if your original intentions *had* worked at the end? Wouldn't it have given the piece a sort of 'happy end' which might have been much more problematic than failing?

BF: It might have become very smug, I suspect. 'Here I am, and this is what it was all about.' And I would dislike that. Of course my music must, in a certain way, always remain open-ended. What fascinates me—and why I never really wrote aleatoric music or indeterminate music of any sort, even at the times when this was a rampant plague—was that I believe that you can only have meaningful open-endedness through an absolutely closed formal concept. A piece radiates out beyond its double bar; in a certain sense, a shadow piece starts in the mind immediately after the last double bar of the composition. This is something which we sacrifice if the piece itself has an open-ended formal conception. I believe very much that fragmentation, for instance, which is something I've thought a great deal about over the years, can only have a musical expressive significance to the extent that we can postulate at least possible alternative ideal completions that never were.

Scores and their performances

RT: Could I move now to the question of performance? Given that it is almost innate in your compositions that the correlation between what is written and what is played will not be perfect, what, for you, are the essential criteria for a good performance of your work?

BF: I would say the establishment of audible criteria of meaningful inexactitude. That is, from work to work, from one section of a work to another section, from one performer to another, from one performance situation to another, the level of meaningful inexactitude is one indication, one hint of the way in which a work 'means'.

RT: So interpretation consists, to some extent, of different intelligent failures to reproduce a central text?

BF: I would say this was true, yes. Unfortunately the situation today is that the central text has no long-term tradition supporting it, in which it is embedded, and which tells us how to play it. Therefore it is our duty as composers to make the text, the visual aspect of the text and its musical structure, so self-referential in an enriching sense that the performer can find some way of plugging it into his own sensibilities—so that he is not trying simply to give a generally tasteful rendering of some set of noises, or whatever, but that these noises are, in a semantically specific sense, interrelated among themselves in such a way that the performer himself can attempt to take an attitude towards that interrelationship.

RT: Obviously, in the sheer technical difficulty of the pieces there is a certain in-built defence mechanism against uncommitted performers. Is even the notation itself, and its *mis-en-page*, a sort of 'protective commentary' (in Debussy's sense) against the dilettantish approach?

BF: Oh, certainly, because I've waited six years now to find a second performer for my bass clarinet solo piece, *Time and Motion Study I*, and it has been a tremendously enriching experience for me after such a long time listening to only one person playing it, however well, to work with a second person on this piece, to hear his attitudes both to it and to the previous performer's interpretation, and to feel a quite different creative illumination of the piece, which is very much in keeping with my ideas about the possibility of interpretational diversity.

RT: Do you find that individual performers of your works are relatively uniform in their interpretations from one night to the next, or are there big discrepancies? There seems to be plenty of scope for the latter: given that one is always struggling for this unreachable object, the direction in which one is going to fall down might easily vary.

BF: Well, this is true, of course. But it isn't the falling down in itself which is significant, it's the attitude one adopts to the necessity of falling down, or the inevitability of it. I would say first of all that there are many performers of my works who differ astoundingly from one another, that certain of my works, like *Unity Capsule* for instance, have types of performance which one might say are almost diametrically opposed, but which reveal nevertheless different aspects of the piece. I of course have my preferences regarding the more valid form, but that's just my preference—the pieces have divorced themselves from me now, except in a biographical sense. On the other hand it's certainly true that any given performer can, under different circumstances, produce a quite different performance, and there is always the danger that a performance will fail almost completely, no matter how many notes are achieved, if it lacks that intensity of awareness of the almost erotic relationship between manual movement, density of notation, and constant awareness of the knife-edge quality of the possibility of not achieving something, and so needing to compensate for it momentarily on another level—for instance, of looking momentarily at a quite different aspect of the piece in order to balance the failure out, one which one hadn't looked at before, or hadn't looked at for some time, or not in that way. This, under favourable circumstances, can produce performances of quite different quality, which nevertheless have very clear identity traits: it's very clearly the same piece, despite all the diversity of other aspects.

RT: Do you ever regret not having the performer's 'erotic-tactile' relationship to your own works? Because you presumably don't play . . .

BF: Not any more, but I *have* played. I've had many and various experiences in the performance of instruments. The instrument I've always played best, perhaps, until I didn't have time to play any more, was the flute, and I suppose that's reflected in my own music.

RT: So for example, were you ever able to play *Cassandra's Dream Song*?

BF: Yes (but not *Unity Capsule* because I never played a ring-keyed flute—so that's my get-out on that subject), certainly, because the techniques involved in *Cassandra's Dream Song* were created through experimentation with the flute. The first form of the piece, which was somewhat shorter than the final version, was created in that way, and it was then subjected to a more intensive compositional analysis *post priori*, and a recomposition, of course.

RT: What happens to your relationship to, for instance, *Cassandra's Dream Song*, when you actually try to play it?

BF: Well, I've never tried to *perform* the piece in a literal sense, although I could; at that time I could play all the individual sections—for some reason, I simply never bothered to put them all together. So I can't really answer that question directly. But even if I did answer it, perhaps it would be irrelevant from the point of view of any other performer, because I never really had a performer's mentality, although I quite enjoyed conducting at one stage, and did quite a lot of it in London: I gave the first performances of a number of my works that way. I was never really interested in that particular tactile relationship to the work; as I said before, tactility can be both emotional and bodily, and intellectual, and spiritual. I don't think that the activity of intellectual creativity is any less erotic than the direct, literal bodily contact with the material.

RT: What relation *do* you have to your work once it is finished? What 'happens' to you when you hear your older pieces?

BF: Oh, I don't like listening to my music, not even new pieces. Generally they sound pretty much like I expected them to sound, so it's what I wanted, and that's it. There have been some performances which have excited me tremendously, the odd few which I've always remembered. But on the whole, at the moment I've established that a piece has the effect that I expected it to have, then in a sense it's living its own life, I'm not connected to it any more. On the other hand, one of the implications of the progressive definition I gave earlier on of style, as something always in progress within the corpus of one's own works, implies also that past works also belong to that same body, and must always be taken account of when moving on. The degree of semanticity inherent in any of the materials included in those works, the way of looking at the world which those works imply, must also be taken into account, either literally or in the back of one's mind, when one carries on. Otherwise one would be doing an injustice to the lived history of the elements one was working with at that moment.

RT: Does a work ever surprise you positively in performance, in the sense that you find more in a

piece than you thought you had put into it?

BF: No. Perhaps that just means that I'm not capable of perceiving more than I thought I'd put into it. Sometimes I've been surprised that certain *sounds* have worked better than I thought they would. On infrequent occasions I've been quite surprised and disappointed that certain sounds haven't worked at all as I expected they would, even though they were recognisably the same sounds. Maybe it's that I've miscalculated at that moment—not the banal hand-work thing of wrong balance, or anything like that (though that has occasionally happened), but far more that I haven't developed, or have over-estimated, for instance, the degree of semantic richness which a particular element has arrived at, so that the element is too transparently fragile at that moment to carry the weight of meaning which I have assigned to it.

RT: Coming back to the score as such: It seems to me that when your scores are published, made available for anyone to buy, they have a significance which is different from that of the average, more obviously realisable score, in that what they mean to the listener is quite different from what they mean to the performer. They are something that the performer is going to attempt to realise; but for the listener they may almost be a confusing factor, representing all too clearly the gulf between what appears to have been conceived, and what appears to have been realised in a particular performance. Is it a problem for you, in that sense, that listeners also buy and read through your scores?

BF: Not at all; quite the opposite! I would say that it simply underlines my general point of view that a work of music is not simply sound, but the sound itself is a cipher for something else which some people call expression, but which I, of course, would prefer to differentiate a lot further, and in a lot of directions. A score as, let's say, a visual representation of a possible sound—that's just one aspect of what a score is. A score is also an entire cultural artefact with an aura of spiritual resonance which is completely its own, in spite of its being related to the sonorous experience of the work in one of its other manifestations. A work takes on these kaleidoscopic manifestations at different times, depending on what aspect of it one is examining, but the totality is far more than most people assume it to be. And therefore I think that the score being one thing and the piece being another is a complete absurdity.

RT: Your scores are also, perhaps, a certain protection against oversimplified hearing. For example, when I was sitting here the other evening listening to *Carceri I*, I was surprised by how transparent the piece sounded. Then, going back and listening with the score, and in stereo instead of mono, I had quite the reverse experience, and I suddenly became aware of how much I *hadn't* heard, not so much because maybe it wasn't audible, but perhaps because I had actually eliminated so much in order to arrive at that, for me, satisfying notion of transparency.

BF: Don't you find that interesting, though? The score can, as you say, be a certain defence reaction against oversimplified listening. It can, however, also be a sort of validation of the immediate quality of the sounds, strangely enough. I've often thought that one of the main tasks a piece has to accomplish, over and beyond its large-scale ambitions, is to persuade a listener to suspend disbelief for the duration of the work; not to sit there passively, like some present-day ideologists would pretend, but to enter into the world of that piece by dissolving his own cultural barriers against it. Now unless a work can achieve this, then no matter what its complexities or its virtues, of course it doesn't succeed with that particular listener. Therefore it is important that the initial sounds of a piece always be sounds that will give the listener that sense of aura, that sense of magnetism, that sense of presence, indefinable in another way, which only a particular sort of aural sensation can achieve. And therefore the beginnings of most of my works have that . . . or I try to make them have a very clear image. This clarity of image is not always maintained subsequently, because one doesn't need to keep hitting the listener on the head with this sort of demand. But I do think that a work, no matter what its qualities may otherwise be, will fail unless this is accomplished. Therefore, the score can act as an antidote to this, and, in a sense, what you were seeing as a problem a moment ago is from my point of view a decided advantage—one sort of listening, or the one sort of perception of a work can then be balanced out by the other, and a much more rounded picture emerges.

A miscellany of works

RT: The title *Funérailles*, apart from its obvious funereal connotations, also invokes Liszt.

BF: Well, yes, I've had a certain 'thing' with Liszt. I don't know why—I'm not particularly fond of his music. But I once considered calling a piece *Les préludes*, and at the moment I'm working on a series of songs called *Études transcendentales* (as a main title, but with a different subtitle).

Why *Funérailles*? I was using the word less in its funereal significance than in terms of *any* form of protracted and rather alienating ritual. One of the things I was dealing with in this piece was myself looking at myself, looking at myself composing—a sort of objectivisation of a subjective reaction. And I often find, when taking part in any ritual (but especially large-scale public ones), that one stands there, basically not taking part in the ritual, but looking at oneself, at one's bodily presence; and that seems to me to be an exact parallel. In the score I produce this story of a Martian landing on top of a large hill and looking down at a parade ground, watching these creatures wandering backwards and forwards in various patterns, and wondering precisely what he would feel about it all. And having felt equally alienated on occasions, having been 'reconstructed' as a partaker in some of these rituals, on whatever level, and being in some sense not oneself, and yet more oneself because of being more aware of oneself not being oneself: this was exactly analogous to the situation of both mystery and immense subjective intensity of investigation which this piece was meant to invoke.

RT: Does that mean that in some ways it's an (uncharacteristically) autobiographical work?

BF: Oh no, the piece isn't at all autobiographical, because it's not the autobiographical, extant, flesh-and-blood me, with his experiences, that is being investigated. It is simply the artist making artistic decisions, or judging already-made artistic decisions from a new artistic standpoint, at the moment of recomposition. I'm involved with the *raison d'être* of the creative act, rather than the person doing the creating. It just happened to be me doing it, but the same process could have been carried out by somebody else, with quite different but equally exemplary results.

RT: On the whole, your titles have very precise

connotations. Yet occasionally you come up with something relatively abstract like the Second Quartet. Did you ever think of calling it something else, or is there a particular intention here in using a purely formal, non-allusive title?

BF: I never thought of calling it anything else, and I'm going to write a third quartet in a couple of years—it has already been booked by the Arditti—which will also be called just, quite banally, 'Third String Quartet.' I've always been fascinated by the string quartet medium, as being one of the few genres in music history whose content is related to a specific instrumental combination. What is appropriate to a string quartet in terms of development of types of argument, intensity, and so on, is traditionally quite different from that in, for instance, a string trio or a piano trio, whose content has always been much more problematic. If we examine the genre of string trio we find the approaches to it range from the divertimento-like, insubstantial, right through to the totally autobiographical, cutting quality of the Schoenberg, for example. So there is a certain logic in invoking certain types of intensity by restricting oneself to the rather abstract nomenclature of 'String Quartet', which wouldn't apply in calling a piece 'String Trio'.

RT: Would you now retrospectively prefer your Sonatas to be called your First Quartet?

BF: Well, to be truthful, they are already my second quartet; there's a string quartet which dates from 1963 which has never seen the public light of day, and probably never will. No, the title 'Sonatas' refers of course to the Purcell connection, which many people see as being much stronger than it actually is. In fact, I like the Fantasias . . .

RT: 'Fantasias' might have been the more appropriate title . . .

BF: Yes . . . without being intensely attracted to anything else he wrote. And they were very much in the 'old style', so that his more modern, advanced style is not one that had any particularly great relevance for me. But nevertheless, to call my pieces 'Sonatas' did at least distance them from the argumentative tradition of the classical string quartet, because my idea in those pieces was to make the *intensity* of the single moment, *à la* Webern, which can be the justification of that moment, in terms of our awareness, expand itself over an extremely long duration, whilst deconstructing itself back into formal cogency. Therefore to call it a string quartet in the normal sense would have been to falsify the issue, because a string quartet normally presupposes a concept of argumentation, in which the validity or not of the types of strategies used in the arguments are not being placed in question: they're already given.

RT: I remember seeing somewhere that you now criticise the Sonatas for String Quartet on the grounds that they consist too much of a structure without content.

BF: I don't think I used those words; I would probably have used the word 'carapace'. Let's put it this way: I think I said that all works contain immediate expression (or message presentation), and skeleton. And in the works I have been writing recently, starting perhaps with the Second String Quartet, the main object of the music has no longer been to incorporate or redefine experiences gained from extra-musical sources, for example (which still interest me, but I don't try to contain them specifically, since I feel that in that respect I've already done, more or less successfully, what I wanted to do), but far more, to get into the real interstices of linguistic formulability. What is the space in which the work really exists? There is a vacuum that exists between the surface presentation —that's what I call the carapace of the Second String Quartet—and the subsurface generative structures. Now the extent to which these two things are separated allows the surface material to take on different degrees of auratic[4] presence. In the Sonatas, the surface *is* the skeleton. That is, it's evident that the processes which are present in the Sonatas are presented to us as expressive means, whereas in the Second String Quartet the surface is very much the sediment of those already disappeared processes which have leadenly disappeared below the surface, like anchors, or like half-deflated balloons beneath the stratosphere: they're swimming at different levels, at different distances from this surface, so that the degree of sonorous causality is different for each type of activity. It allows us, as it were, to mentally distance ourselves, and forces us to refocus; it gives a sort of analogy (though not in a direct sense) to innate, in-built tonal prejudices, so to speak, that allow us to relativise single events in terms of a larger frame. Every work produces a different relationship here, of course, so one can't talk about a generalised process. But from work to work, over a long period of time, with the constant redevelopment and redefinition of the means under the frame, I have great hopes that—at least within the scope of my work—some sort of redefinition of this kind can come about.

RT: I suppose the Sonatas, and maybe the Sonata for Two Pianos, were the first works of yours to attract considerable attention. Is this where the 'real Ferneyhough' starts? Listening retrospectively, is there a specific piece which you regard as having been *the* step forward?

BF: No, because there have always been steps back, or at least recuperative steps, in place of the 'great advance'. I've always moved in a pendulum-like way, from the most adventurous and investigatorial approach back to a middle-of-the-road stance, in order to recontextualise the elements I have been working with.

RT: Were the big steps forward always the works for large forces?

BF: No, not always. The Sonatas, of course, were very important. If you look at the other works which I wrote at that time, you will see the tremendous gap that exists between even the Sonata for Two Pianos and the Sonatas for String Quartet. The Sonatas for String Quartet were written at an incredibly crisis-ridden period of my life, and I think that both this emotional crisis and, of course, my relative youth at the time are very evident in the facture of the work. So it's a work that remains very embedded in my consciousness in some ways, and that's why I didn't write a second quartet for many years: it was necessary for me to overcome that piece.

Otherwise, it's easier for me to tell you which are the significant ends of things, rather than the beginnings. The ends of cycles are always important, like *Firecycle Beta*, for example, which has never been performed in Britain, or *Epicycle*, which also hasn't. One can see the continuity of these works from the Sonatas; they were always magnified versions of those, moving in slightly different directions, and with slightly different concerns. So I would say I could define *Firecycle* as being the end of a period, and I could define *La terre est un homme* as being the end of a period, rather than saying what were the decisive steps forward. I suppose you could say that the works

that come after that were steps forward, but of course forward only in a linear sense, and because of course one always tries to work on the highest level available to one at any given moment.

RT: If you've arrived at the end of a cycle, do you find yourself saying, in effect, 'God, what do I do next?'

BF: No, except that in one case, where I didn't write anything for a long time, this was really true. After writing *Firecycle Beta*, not only was I unable, and also, ultimately, unwilling to write *Firecycle Alpha* and *Gamma* (so that the work remained a torso) but I also felt that this type of Utopian vision of what a musical language was or ought to be was esentially played out. It had been very useful for the production of a certain number of works, which even today I still think have their points and which I wouldn't reject by any means, but it didn't provide me with any fruitful humus to carry on. Thus there was this period where I had to find some new motivation for composing, and finally this motivation (in the *Time and Motion Study* series) was the total integration of all those things which had always interested me as an intellectual human being, shall we say—the various philosophies, the ideas of poetics, the basic ways of looking at the world, the various disciplines of self-development, and so on, through which one approaches certain states of being in the Western tradition.

RT: Can you say something about the forthcoming cycle, and the title: *Carceri d'invenzione*?

BF: Well, the most obvious reference is, of course, to the etchings-cycle of architectural fantasies by the Roman architect-artist Piranesi. What interested me most about these pictures is that they are multi-perspectival. Although, on the surface, they look to be rather fantastically realistic, they actually generate lines of force, or energies, which are not commensurate with one another on a realistic level. And these grating, scraping contradictions force us to reconstruct not just the fictional space of the picture but actually to regard the edge of the page, not as a limit to the invention but as the point at which these unfinished perspectival energies really emanate out into the world, and force us to reperspectivise the world of everyday existence which confronts us beyond the limits of the work.

This is exactly what I try to do in music. The work itself is meant to create the scraping, raw edges, the frictions and lines of force which project themselves, labyrinth-like, out beyond the limits of the actual duration of the work, to infect or colour our perspectives of the way in which the world is perceived. So this was one straightforward analogy. The other aspect of the title—*Carceri*, of course, means 'dungeons' or 'prisons'—is that I believe that constriction lies at the basis of all artistic creativity: if the artist isn't faced with a certain limited situation, he usually doesn't create.

I was working with one particular constriction, which was the concept of repetition. The beginning of *Carceri d'invenzione I* makes it very clear that I start the same material or similar material several times, and continue it differently, for different lengths each time. There are things like the repetition in each instrument of phases of different length: literal or partially literal repetition, in which the beginnings and ends, or certain segments from the middle of these repetitions are chopped out each time round. So the cycle for each instrument is getting shorter and shorter, but different parts of it are missing each time; for each instrument, there is a different strategy of elimination. So the kaleidoscopic totality is continually changing, and the repetition is not immediately apparent as such: it has already been sinking a little bit below the surface. For instance, I can have literal repetitions of technique, allied to totally different materials; or I can use the same material, differentiated in a variety of ways, and varying combinations of these in different layers.

Secondly, the 'dungeon-like' nature of the piece exists both in the horizontal and in the vertical dimension. Horizontally because differing layers, while taking note of one another, and utilising similar materials on occasions, often follow different types of logic, shall we say, to arrive at different points; they define themselves in different ways, having differing types of hierarchical ordering, the one with another, at different points in the piece. Vertically, I have adopted various techniques, which it would take too long to describe here, in which the length of space defined by a bar allows a certain density of material to be constricted or expanded, so that the same material may occur in bars of different lengths, correspondingly faster or slower. Alternatively, only a certain proportion of the material may occur in a bar of different length, or the material of three previous bars may be contracted into one new bar of perhaps even shorter length than the original bars, so that the material may be much slower or much faster; it's a kind of proportional canonic technique, relating to the material contained within one bar, rather than entire strings of material. That's one aspect of the verticalisation. The second aspect is the new type of metric system I have developed, which includes beats of irrational lengths in relation to the basic tempo of the piece. So you find strange things like the whole ensemble jerking immediately into a perceptibly different rapidity: there's a click, a trigger at the beginning of each bar that coincides with this change of tempo. One hears this best of all in the first piece of the series, *Superscriptio* for solo piccolo, where it's very schematically employed.

So both at the level of analogy—the relationship to the fantastical imagination and the associated perspectival energies related to Baroque imaginative architectural notions, as exemplified by Piranesi, but also by other people—and also in the literal way that materials are disposed in the vertical and horizontal dimensions, the way I delimit the choices I have of the types of technique I use, or the types of material to which the techniques are applied at different times: both these aspects are implied in the title. That is, '*Dungeons* of Invention': without these limitations, the invention would be of a quite different sort, or might not be at all.

Working with microtones

RT: Microtones seem to be playing an increasingly important role in your recent work.

BF: Well, *all* works involve microtones in some sense, for me. But the question of microtones, it is true, is very important to me at the present time. I am using microtones very much in a systematic fashion; that is, the simultaneity of pitch materials which I am employing in most of the works of this seven-work cycle *Carceri d'invenzione* allows for the gradual introduction or elimination of microtonal materials. This is very important harmonically. In previous works, certainly in the first version of *Funérailles* for instance, many of the microtonal inflections are indeed just that: inflections. They were like a sort of glissando or exaggerated vibrato—they might be something which points up the limits of one particular functional entity.

RT: They're almost articulation types, in a sense.

BF: They're articulation types, yes, that's true.

RT: So where does the situation begin to swing around? And did it swing round decisively, or is it that in the course of time your attitude to microtonal elements has gradually become more systematic, more integrated?

BF: I would say it has become more integrated, though even in *Epicycle*, in 1968, if you look at the one page which is without metre, which is full of pauses to be held for a certain length of time, the harmony on that page (which I think is quite successful, well balanced) is built entirely of pre-calculated, microtonal chords. So I would say it's a question of degree rather than absolutes.

RT: If you use microtones in an integrated way, does this mean that you think that their perceptual qualities are just as great as those of tempered intervals? Do you expect the interval of one-and-a-quarter tones to be registered by the listener just as precisely as a semitone or a tritone?

BF: Well, using the term 'registered precisely' already implies a certain grammaticality of all intervals and their perceptibility—that one assigns functions to them in some way. I would say that there is a certain quality to a whole-tone plus quarter-tone which is perceptible even with a certain degree of flexibility as to exactitude. I don't regard these things as functional, perceptible units, I regard them as areas of sensation, the same as I would with a major 3rd; if a major 3rd is slightly out of tune, it still has the quality of a major 3rd.

RT: Do you think the ear has the same capacity under current circumstances to 'correct' a slightly false microtone in the way that it obviously 'corrects' the slightly deviant major 3rd?

BF: It depends on the context, I would say. I mean, you say one corrects a major 3rd automatically, but the question is, to what purpose the major 3rd is there, in what context it finds itself, with what other intervals. I'm thinking now of the strange beginning of one of the movements of *Le marteau sans maître*,[5] where the guitar plays a minor 3rd that seems totally alien under those circumstances, which seems either a great stroke of genius, or a grave error on the part of the composer. I've never been quite sure which.

RT: I know the opening you mean: it sounds very odd . . .

BF: Does one there, or would one, assuming the note was slightly out of tune, correct it in the sense which you imply? I beg leave to doubt it; at least, it's an arguable point. And I suppose that everyone's perception is different—it depends on what you've heard immediately before, it depends on what your expectations are, and so on. Therefore I would say again with microtones, and the perception of the individual quality of certain types of microtonal interval, that it depends on the consistency with which you use them: how closely the last example of the same interval occurs to the one you're now listening to, on the type of texture, the type of motivic or non-motivic texture within which the interval is embedded. How isolated is it, for instance: was the last example of the same interval or a similar interval identifiably in the same instrumental colour? All these things play a tremendous role, and one plays with all these things when composing. I don't believe any composer works just with intervals. If he does, there's something gravely lacking in his sensibility. One works with total contexts, one places intervals as one component into an organic unit, and the same with microtonal intervals.

RT: Is there a certain element, then, of Lewis Carroll's 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.'?

BF: Well, you know there is, but we mustn't take it to ridiculous extremes. I would say that sound is never just sound. Sound is always the reflection of context, of contour. If we abstract any one of our sensations from a context, then that sensation takes on a very strange quality. Like if you wake up in the middle of the night: we don't know where we are, we see a strange, pale square in front of us. Is that square one inch in front of our eyes, or is it five feet away? Is it an opening, or an illuminated surface? And until we've worked this out—that it is actually an open door leading out into a moonlit area—we have gone through all sorts of permutations in our minds. The perception of a work of music, for me, is very much allied to this contextualisation of sensation, because the sensation as such is almost never abstract, so that even this strange experience of seeing this seemingly abstract space has already been conditioned by our previous expectations; in making this perception, the mind has already very rapidly scanned previous possible experiences of this type.

Style, gesture, and figure

RT: Can we come back to the question of style, and particularly your views on the relationship of gesture and figure?

BF: I would say that there are two things wrong with much contemporary style. Those who fulminate most readily against serial techniques are exactly those who fall into the same dilemma. Their argument against parametric thinking, if I may put it in that general way, is that serial techniques generate isolated, contextless monads via the accidental coming-together of streams of innately independently generated parametric specifications; and that these single monads, perceptually, could not enter into meaningful relationships with their surroundings other than in a banal and superficial, quasi-expressionistic fashion. But on the other hand, it seems to me that those composers who now adopt what I call the ideology of the 'transparency to expression of the single gesture' fall into exactly the same monadic trap.

RT: So Rihm, for example . . .

BF: As we heard yesterday evening.[6] Now I'm putting words into these people's mouths, and perhaps they could indeed confute me by saying, 'That's not what we meant at all.' But listening to their music and reading their writings, it seems to be the case that for them a gesture, belonging to whatever preconceived repertoire, has a semantic significance, a certain constant semantic significance, relating to the sort of emotion we are meant to recognise it as representing.

RT: It's an *Affektenlehre*.

BF: Yes. Now it seems to me that a composer sitting and looking inside himself, and writing down a gesture, is attempting as it were to draw that gesture, that emotion which he observes in himself, in terms of musical notation. Therefore, logically, the more this gesture is in itself an iconic representation of the emotion, and is therefore self-sufficient—either it represents this thing or it doesn't—the more it represents it, the more it in itself is its own justification, via this representational connection, the less contact it needs, structurally speaking, with any other

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gestures placed in the same context. Because either a gesture is iconic or it's not. And the more it aims towards representing something other than itself (by being, as I said, transparent to emotive significance) the less it needs any kind of relativising contextuality, in terms of a general language, other than just the basic vocables, shall we say.

RT: So we're back at what Boulez once said about Messiaen: that he doesn't compose, he juxtaposes.

BF: Yes, and we're back at the stage where the only form-building means available seem to be either the banal contrast principle, or some kind of chain principle, putting things together in some sort of more-or-less interesting order whereby very often the events could be changed round without a great deal of interference to the general emotive patterning. Now it seems to me that the only consequence of that for young composers today is that one sees everywhere a sort of new conservatism, in which they are reading in the textbooks about examples of rondo form and passacaglia form, they're writing symphonies again. This sort of neoconservatism seems a logical consequence of this monadic contextlessness of the single affective gesture. They are forced to impose an arbitrary, extraneous, and very academic formal structure upon these isolated instances of what may or may not be authentic expression.

RT: In these pieces, it seems to me, the gesture and the form appear meaningful to an audience only in so far as they're known in advance. And to that extent, it's a little like throwing out known and appreciated lumps of cheese to groups of Pavlovian rats.

BF: Yes. And the effective gestures are just as isolated as the single sonic units of a serial work would be, except of course they have the slight advantage of relating already to vocabularies of previous periods, which, however, have themselves become anaemic, simply by creating general categories of expression. We say, 'Aha, that's meant to be a dramatic, despairing gesture', or whatever. We typify this particular, no doubt deeply felt, structure as being simply a token of that generalised type. And that being so, we could replace it with almost any other example of the same type, and still retain approximately the same amount of information.

RT: It's almost like a *Young Werther* situation; the succession and intensity of the emotions are far more important than there being any good cause for any of them, or than any particular emotion.

BF: Yes, this is true. And one of the things that disturbs me most, as I understand it, particularly in Germany, is the recent *rapprochement* between the new Romantics and the sociocritical school, the *musica negativa* of Lachenmann and others—the fact that each school seems to recognise its own negative image in the other.

RT: That really surprises me.

BF: Well, it doesn't surprise me, because they both have similar views of what we might call 'History' with a capital 'H'. Each of them refers—Rihm positively, Lachenmann negatively—to a posited totality of history. One draws his musical nourishment from it; the other generates semantic significance by constantly negating it in every moment of a work. But of course, this 'totality of history' is itself a fiction, and I would have thought that it's impossible, in any given work, to sit facing this gigantic, monolithic totality, and produce anything individually viable as a particular work. It's like wanting to write, totally immersed in history but sitting outside it. If it were true that they *were* regarding the totality of music history in each work, and realising it in one way or another, then of course each work would just become some sort of *Schmarotzer* ['parasite'].

RT: Perhaps the point at issue is really that, whether positively or negatively, the definition of music history that they both accept is simply that of the average concert-goer.

BF: Well, that of the average German concert-goer, in fact. Well, this is what I was saying, that just because you put a capital 'H' on the false totality of musical history, this doesn't make it some sort of overall, viewable, and consumable, or appreciable, usable object. And I think that if these people—as I believe Lachenmann is beginning to do—are prepared to concentrate on particular manifestations of historical subjectivity, then no doubt one can do something with it. But to call late-17th-century to early-20th-century music—German music—'music history' seems to me to be rather . . . questionable.

One of the things I'm trying to do is to distinguish between the gesture as such, which in itself is an objective, material-bound presence—we can examine its delineations, we can appreciate it as a total 'vocable' on whatever level (which is why overall style is of no great importance to me—one can write in perfect 5ths or do what one wants—that's not the question), and the figural aspect of a gesture ('figurality' being itself a subcategory of gesture). The thing which distinguishes the figural way of constructing or observing a gesture from the 'gestural' part of the gesture is that one is attempting to realise the totality of the gesture in terms of its possible deconstruction into parametric tendencies. That is, no longer does one attempt to create a gesture via the automatic coming together of abstract parametric units or quantities, nor does one try to build a gesture as an affective quantity, and place these totalities against one another. One attempts to so construct gestures that the parametric qualities of which they are composed are released into the world of the music, as it were, into the future, the future potential of the music, at the moment in which the gesture presents itself. So at the moment in which the gesture actually dissolves into the future, certain parametric elements, which owe their original *raison d'être* to having been embedded in this gesture (and therefore are no longer isolated quanta, floating, free-ranging nothings, 'quarks' or whatever), are released in order to be able to conflate in different ways, or coincide to produce new gestural units. So for me, the ideal situation is one in which neither the abstract gesture in itself, nor the use of parametric thinking to generate gestures, but the gesturally justified, free-ranging employment of parametric information is the centre of all compositional concern.

RT: So the figural content of a gesture is precisely the thing that will allow that gesture to turn into something else.

BF: Well, it's the thing which is justified, first of all, by its particular contextualisation, its particular anchoring in a gestural context. But at the same time the context, the whole tenor of the argument of the work, must be such that some of these particular favoured parametric elements at any moment, however produced, must already be attempting to subvert and dissolve the gesture to which they belong. They must be at least as powerful as the gesture, and this seems to me to be the only way to jump the gestural barrier from one monadic unit, one experiential unit to another: by certain elements of that gesture dissolving themselves out of the general context, and having

enough individual energy to flow either immediately or at a somewhat later time into connection with other parametric layers to form new gestural units.

RT: To what extent do you think the notion of gesture is ineradicably linked with certain inherited emotional responses?

BF: Absolutely, which is why I think it's rather unfruitful for us to argue about the relevance of this or that gestural type. On the whole I espouse, with certain reservations, the idea of pluralism, and the *ideal*, also, of pluralism in contemporary stylistic thinking. I would not try to impose what some people seem to be desiring most ardently: some sort of generalised, so-called 'common musical language'. I think this would be an appalling and arbitrary concept. I have seen in the case of some so-called 'schools' which have been built in the past few years that this does indeed lead to a certain communality of style, but only on the most primitive of levels. The communality of style serves to eliminate many of those differential aspects which might have produced richness and a possible individual creative urge for each particular composer. And it seems to me that plurality of style, or the concept of pluralism in style, is in no way contradictory to the sort of principle to which I hold firm. And it seems to me that it is only by accepting surface gestural differentiation—pluralism—can one hope to eliminate most of these rather unfruitful arguments about common language and comprehensibility.

RT: Coming back to gesture in your own work, it seems to me that it is obviously necessary for you, in a work like *Carceri d'invenzione I*, to begin with something that has enormous developmental potential . . .

BF: Absolutely . . .

RT: . . . but is also very much 'a gesture' as such—that is to say, a gesture in the sense of being an extremely clearly focused musical idea, which draws attention to the piece. To lay out a set of propositions, one must be concerned with gestures.

BF: This is true: I think there's no point in presenting something you intend to use in a tentative way. If it's going to be used as a basis for enhanced figural deployment of parametric information, you can't present something which itself is too weak to provide the parameters with some conflict. If they're going to escape, they've got to generate enough energy to escape the confining gravitational walls of the gesture itself, and break out in differing directions. If the gesture itself is too weak to contain them to a significant degree, then their escape of the gesture, their expansion in conceptual space, will not itself seem significant.

RT: When you mark the opening section of *Carceri I* 'brilliant and vulgar', that in a sense must also relate back to an *Affektenlehre*: there must be in your mind the notion that this kind of gesture is innately both 'brilliant' and 'vulgar', and will be received by other people as such—not because they'll say, 'Ah, that's brilliant and vulgar', but in the more sublimated way that one normally hears music.

BF: In fact it was described in one review, I recall, as 'crass'.

RT: Well, actually I don't even find it particularly vulgar (or maybe I just like that kind of vulgarity): it's very strident, very hard-edged, and it's also very much a 'listen-to-me!' gesture, I think.

BF: Well, also of course for subcutaneous reasons. It being the piece that follows *Superscriptio* in the same cycle, I had to use the piccolo as the connecting element. At the same time I had to show, again emblematically, the idea of extremes, by taking the relatively low extreme of the trombone, and the high extreme of the piccolo, playing the basic interval, which runs through all the pieces in varying ways—the tritone (and the diminished 7th chord). Using the same playing technique, the fluttertongue at the dynamic extreme (very loud) was an attempt, as it were, to hold the piece together, while creating the feeling that the middle, the empty middle, was a tremendously powerful force wanting to push these two extremes right out of the piece altogether. So already I was trying to develop a tremendous amount of energy, which immediately, via the parametric levels, attempting to escape from both the rigid constriction and the tremendous force simultaneously, allowed the piece to explode into its own future.

So this opening gesture was not just a dramatic gesture to get people's attention, although of course the hortatory function cannot be entirely discounted! it *is* a bit like banging a bass drum. Nevertheless it did have a very important figural function for me. To be even more banally concrete, the fluttertongue is one of the basic figural devices which is employed a great deal in that particular material; the piccolo, trombone, and piano are important constants in defining that material at times when it has been superimposed with other materials. And the emptiness of that middle space itself, via its proper negative, also becomes parametrically important in two ways. That is, when the other wind instruments enter, they come in exactly that area which the piccolo and trombone did not fill, with suave and flowing material. On the other hand, whereas the piccolo and trombone remain largely at the extremes, the piano, which is first of all at the extremes with the trombone and piccolo, gradually becomes denser and denser in its writing. Instead of just basic two-part writing it becomes very dense: five- or six-part chords moving towards the centre of the keyboard, so that it too comes to fill that empty space. And this has a reflection much further forward in the piece, at the end of the first major part, the piano solo and the brass 'bangs' with the drums, where the piano does exactly the same thing again; moving from a very wide distribution of pitches, it comes—exactly like at the end of *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*—to this interlocked-hands cluster. So the whole thing is being 'imprisoned' more and more by these forces. If I were just doing it as a dramatic gesture, I believe that these forces would seem very implausible as entities, whereas by simultaneously *figurally* interpreting certain gestural units on several levels, through temporal and perceptual space, into the future, I believe I authenticate and validate these particular dramatic gestural devices as—what shall we say?—coherent definitions of lines of force.

RT: Again, let's take the opening of *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*. From your point of view it may be a sort of 'anti-material', but it's still very much a gesture, in the sense that one hears this rapid sequence of notes, rather high up, and one's immediate response is, 'What *is* this?' And before one has had time to work out exactly what it is—it's a sort of 'tangled' material, in a way—just as you're trying to disentangle it, it retangles itself. It may be 'neutral', in a certain way, but nevertheless there is a certain gestural content in that, I would say, as there needs to be to draw one's attention.

BF: Sure! Yes, obviously the gestural content of the beginning was conscious for me, although I started

off with a very abstract series of pitches. The moment I had decided on octave registers for the pitches, and decided that I would keep the repeated pitches that turned up, there was a great deal of gesturality involved. Nevertheless, the figurational aspect of that initial material was less significant in the very first gestural appearance than in the second that immediately follows, because there we are already showing possible parametric expansional techniques, but at the same time, we are demonstrating the actual constriction of the original. So at the same time as freeing itself from this space, it is reminding us what the original space was.

RT: Precisely by omitting it.

BF: And that's what I mean by parametric lines of force: tendential lines of force, which are flowing in various directions all the time, and which validate individual gestures in respect of their predecessors or successors.

What I insist on is this: that whatever stylistic exterior one employs for one's music, the interior concept needs to be defined diachronically: that is, not in terms of your relationship to a large-scale history (although that has to be thought through too), but through the way the paths, particular elements, and vocables in one's personal musical environment develop, either within one piece (in which case you have to organise it very demonstratively by deconstructing the piece within itself, and by presenting its elements to us as part of the development process), or by allowing these things to expand from piece to piece in one's own *oeuvre*, to enrich one another, and to take up new combinations. And this can only be done by parametric expansion, as opposed to gestural relationship; and the gesture then is, in a sense, subsumed to the lines of force which are demonstrated by the new combinatorial potentials of the parametric subcomponents themselves. And it seems to me, therefore, that whatever style one writes in, one needs to have this continuity of diachronic consciousness, which one attributes to, and from which grow, all the auto-history of generation of each of the vocables we employ. We have to validate them in personal historical terms, our own personal historical terms, and those of the vocables themselves. And I think this is impossible in styles which in themselves employ large percentages of linguistic discrepancy.

[1] Joel Bons, 'Intervista a Brian Ferneyhough', *Quaderni della Civica Scuola di Musica, Milano*, anno iii, no.8 (1983), pp. 7-25.
[2] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', *Labyrinths*, trans. D. Yates and J. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 62-71.
[3] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 259.
[4] Compare Walter Benjamin's use of the term 'aura' in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, pp. 219-53. For example, 'We define the aura [of natural objects] as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.' (p. 224).
[5] The reference is to the opening of the fourth movement of Boulez's work, 'Commentaire II de "Bourreaux de solitude" '.
[6] Wolfgang Rihm's *Ohne Titel: '5. Streichquartett'* was given its première in Brussels on 9 December 1983.

James Ingram

The Notation of Time

A too pragmatic approach to the problem of notation has many disadvantages, among which is the encouragement of the reactionary belief that the experiments of the fifties and sixties can be written off as the ravings of a group of dilettantes. It must be admitted that those experiments have failed to supply us with any powerful alternative solutions, but the unquestioning use of the standard notation (and the consequent lack of understanding about the reasons for its particular conventions) is responsible for much sterility in the world of new music.

The achievements of this notation are very considerable, but it is my contention that there are important areas (above all with regard to the subdivision of time) in which the conventions that control the symbols have no relation to the events experienced by musicians, and that these areas are masked by a continuing tradition of performance practice. My intentions are, however, not entirely negative, and I hope that while destroying some of the credibility of the standard notation I can promote a more thoughtful attitude to the subject, and show that it is possible to develop more efficient notations.

As we know it, the standard music notation is fundamentally dualistic. The real world is described as differing from a formal world by means of an element that we call 'expressivity'. This dualism between the absolute world described by the symbols, and the vaguely defined expressivity, lies at the heart of the problem of modern notation, and a brief review of its evolution is therefore necessary.

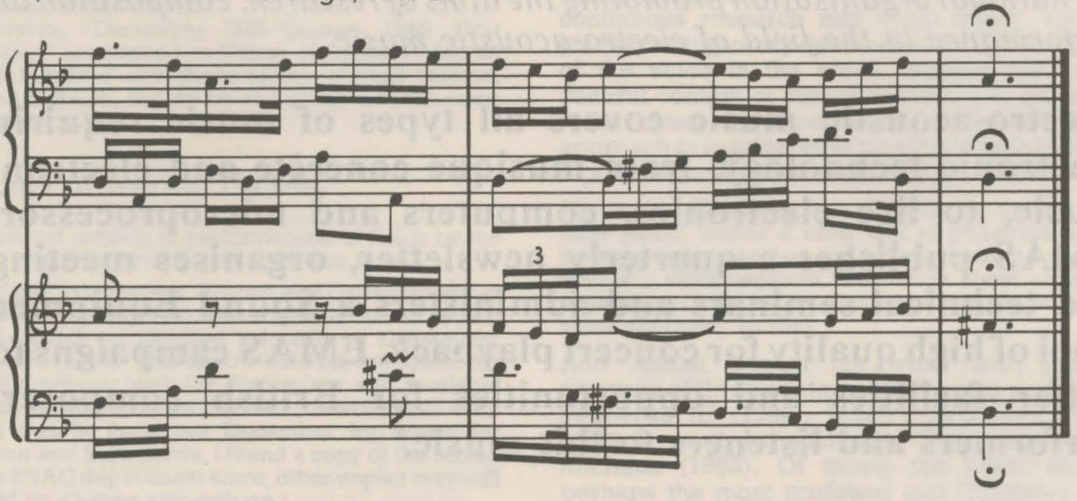
Although this kind of dualism can be traced back to Plato, serious attempts to notate musical time begin with the invention of clockwork in the 15th and 16th centuries. Clockwork was invented by men who were trying to predict the motions of the stars. It was therefore, from the beginning, closely related to the idea of heavenly immutability, and consequently had a profound effect on contemporary thinking about time.[1] Regularity and quantisation were, at this period, given a new emphasis both in the music and in the new notations (by means such as bar-lines and duration flags). Bar-lines and graph paper have much in common, and graph paper was to play a crucial part in the advances of 17th-century science.

Newtonian mathematics treated the dimensions of space and time as being formally equivalent (as is the case in clocks and other mechanical objects), and made use of powerful notations to describe certain formal systems. The correspondence between such systems and the real world was, at first, a matter of heated debate, but Newton and his followers were eventually victorious because they were overwhelmingly successful in the field of mechanics, and because they were able to limit the argument to areas in which they could reason logically.

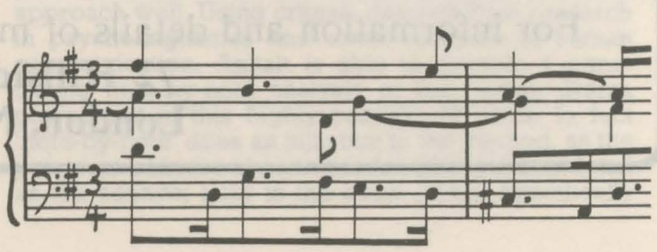
Such impressive progress in physics inevitably led musicians to try to improve their own notations, and it is no accident that the ornament signs (𝆖 𝆗 𝆘 𝆙 etc.) were replaced at this time by written-out decorations using the much more powerful duration symbols of a more formal system. It should be noted that the symbols were not used as rigorously then as later; this was due to the intrinsic impossibility of describing contemporary performance practice in terms of any absolute world (witness the many books on the subject). Nevertheless, there was a wish to formalise the notation and it developed

Example 1

(a) J.S. Bach, from *Die Kunst der Fuge*, 1749-50



(b) Bach, Sarabande, from Partita BWV829



The alignments are those of the edition published by Bach himself in *Clavier-Übung*, vol.1 (Leipzig, 1731)

accordingly.

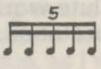
During the 18th century there was a tendency for composers to try to narrow the gap between the world described by their notation and the real world of performed music. There were, of course, very pragmatic reasons for this, apart from the understandable desire to appear logical. Composers had particular difficulty in deciding how to represent durations having proportions other than 1:1 or 1:2—triplets first appeared towards the middle of the century, and the dotted rhythms of the period (Example 1) were a source of much puzzlement to 19th- and early 20th-century musicians (and engravers).

When the early Romantics introduced 'irrational' durations, in order to break out of the limitations set by classical notation, they did so at a moment of supreme confidence in the system. The convergence, during the previous century, of compositional style with the possibilities inherent in the notation had, after all, been crowned by some very great pieces of music. Composers were, as always, concerned primarily with the effectiveness of the notation and secondarily with its logicality. The beginning of the 19th century was far too early for anyone to be questioning received wisdom about the nature of the (Newtonian) world. Interestingly enough the Romantics are the supreme dualists.

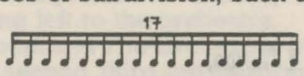
At this period the remaining 'illogicalities' within the notation were finally resolved and there have been exact rules for the use of dotted notes and subdivision symbols ever since. These rules demand that duration symbols should add up within a bar: they thus involve the theoretical equivalence of a duration symbol with a segment of absolute time—one should in principle be able to substitute an absolute value (number of seconds) for each duration symbol.[2] (It was also at this date that the metronome became important.)

The confusion surrounding 'irrational' durations arises because in absolute time the size of a time segment can be determined without reference to its context. Musicians thought they were subdividing time, when they were really comparing tempos. Contemporary philosophy treated time as if it were equivalent to a dimension of space, and it seemed natural, when it was found possible to distribute the symbols regularly by subdividing a single segment of space, to think that time could be treated in a similar manner (Example 2).

The subdivision of a single time segment is, however, completely impossible. In order to subdivide anything equally, we first need to know how big it is. In time, this means being given at least one more (comparable) time segment as a unit of measurement. For



to be meaningful, two tempos must exist. Firstly the tempo created by the total length of the group and the preceding unit of measurement, and secondly the tempo created by the notes within the group. Symbols for high degrees of subdivision, such as



are meaningless because the notes cannot be played fast enough to produce a total duration shorter than the maximum that can be accurately remembered.

Once expressivity had been necessarily established as an article of faith, it was inevitable that tempos should become more flexible—and that the notation should cease to develop! (Musicians do, after all, live in the real world, where the use of rigid tempos is not obligatory.) This had the effect (since subdivision is the estimation of a tempo relationship) of forcing musicians to rely more and more heavily on (unnotated) performance practice in order to remain synchronous: one learns how to play Wagner in rehearsals, not just by reading the notes. Visual (conducted) and aural cues thus became increasingly important.

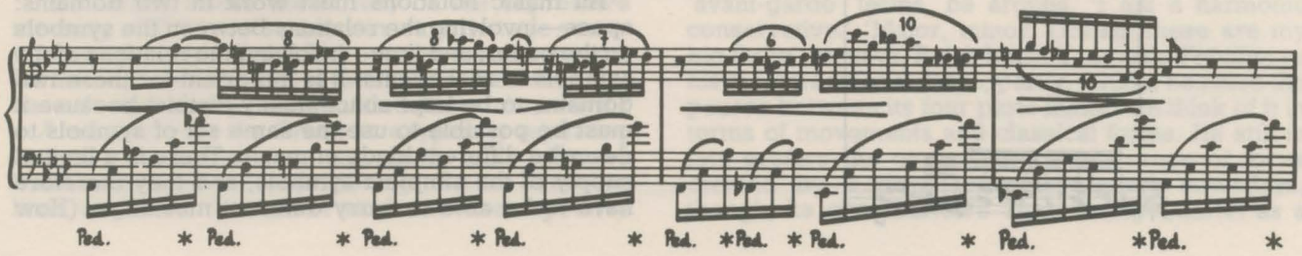
It is not surprising that the widening gap between the real world and the conventions governing the symbols eventually led to a catastrophic loss of control. The famous collapse at the start of this century is often wrongly and rather vaguely interpreted as being the result of an exhausted harmonic language. Time and harmony are of course related, but time is the more fundamental. The classical rules of harmony assume that simultaneities are predictable, and when this was no longer the case the rules simply became meaningless. We know from early recordings that very considerable amounts of *rubato* were used at this date (and not only in performances of the then contemporary music).

Composers *write* music, and their natural reaction to a hopeless situation was to decide that expressivity had caused the problem, and that the exact correspondence between the duration symbols and absolute time (which had become an integral part of their notation) should be 'restored'. It is, of course, impossible to remove half a dualism and retain a system that will work in the real world. Compromises therefore had to be made from the start. The 19th-century expedient of relying on performance practice to ease the apparent rigidity of the notation was, however, not acceptable—it was thought to have been entirely responsible for the recent disaster! The consequent overuse of rigid tempos led, inevitably, by the middle of this century, to the composition of some incredibly boring music.

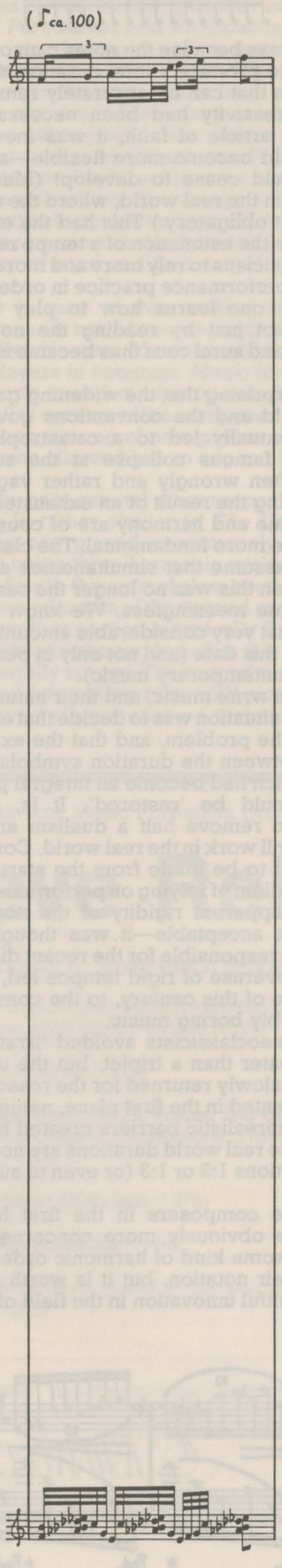
The early neoclassicists avoided 'irrational' subdivisions greater than a triplet, but the use of such subdivisions slowly returned for the reason that they had been invented in the first place, namely to break through the unrealistic barriers created by classical notation. In the real world durations are not restricted to the proportions 1:2 or 1:3 (or even to sums of such proportions).

Progressive composers in the first half of this century were obviously more concerned with re-establishing some kind of harmonic order than with rethinking their notation, but it is worth noting that their most fruitful innovation in the field of technique

Example 2 Chopin, Ballade op.52, 1842, bars 152-5

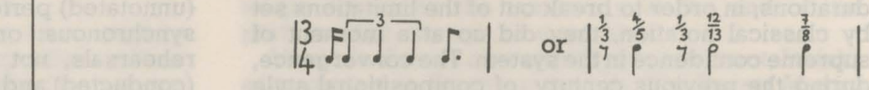


Example 3



(serialism) blurs the distinction between vertical and horizontal.

Because the equivalence of the duration symbols to absolute time was not in question, there seemed no obstacle in the early 1950s to the introduction of an unrestricted use of fractional durations. However, as I have already shown, 'subdivision of time' is really a loose term meaning the existence of a tempo relationship; it is therefore nonsensical to use subdivision symbols to write music that avoids a perceivable tempo of reference. The expression of durations as precise fractions of other durations inevitably leads to serious restrictions on the positions in space and time at which they can begin. Diagrams such as



are possible only as constructions in space, in spite of their seeming to represent perfectly reasonable segments of absolute time. They do not, however, mean anything, because each fraction is not preceded by a duration of comparable size, and there is therefore no tempo of reference for the 'subdivision'.

Of the attempts to create expressive (non-rigid) notations, the most important is space–time notation whose expressivity is stressed because it is, for typographical reasons, impossible to read accurately. Unfortunately the inability to perform it correctly also restricts the amount of information it can successfully transmit, and therefore its degree of usefulness as a music notation. That it remains fundamentally dualistic is revealed by equations such as 1 cm = 1 second. Composers were still notating an ideal world from which the real one would differ, and another catastrophe was unavoidable.

That the available notations all seemed to be in some way out of control, contributed to the idea that 'chance' could play a significant part in musical technique. If there is a weak link between the symbols and the reality, then the symbols can be moved about at random without affecting the reality significantly. No rational organisation of the symbols will alter the reality significantly either. Randomness can in this situation be used instead of expressivity to complete the dualism inherent in the notation.

The proliferation of different ways of describing time led to a situation in which it was thought that different kinds of time actually exist.[3] Though understandable, this view is unrealistic and lacks a convincing simplicity. It is possible to formulate any number of ideal worlds from which the real one will differ more or less significantly, and within each of these worlds rules may be applied with great freedom and logicality. But problems will always arise when such absolute worlds are translated into the real one via interpretation.

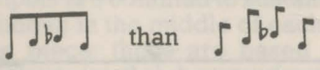
It is now more than 80 years since physicists began telling us to regard with suspicion the Newtonian world view which makes this kind of dualistic thinking necessary. The remainder of this article describes a practical, non-dualistic, approach to the problem of notating musical time.

All music notations must work in two domains: space—involving the relations between the symbols on the paper; and time—involving the relations of the symbols to real events. It is important for these two domains to be kept conceptually distinct because it must be possible to use the same set of symbols to describe different kinds of music. There is a limited supply of the simplest symbols, and they therefore have to be able to carry different meanings. (How

many ways are there to use a dot?) In order to process the information carried by a symbol it first has to be read, and legibility is therefore a major requirement of any notation. Since the standard notation is the product of an evolution lasting several hundred years, we may expect it to contain some valuable lessons about legibility, and a closer inspection is therefore in order.

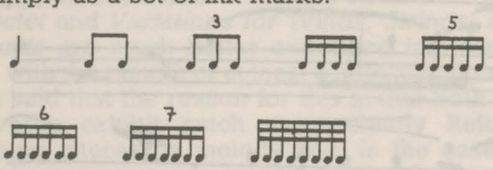
As part of their concern with notation, composers in the fifties and sixties made a concerted attempt to improve the standard notation, but with only limited success. They did not fail simply because musicians were unwilling to change old habits. It was generally thought that smoother symbols would lead to a less cluttered notation, and would therefore be easier to read. This is sometimes, but not always, the case. The substitution of straight flags for curly ones on the duration symbols was perhaps the most successful reform of this type. The failures were more numerous, and included the attempts to replace oval note-heads with round ones and five-lined staves with fewer lines, to introduce different kinds of symbols for the accidentals, and, in texts, to use sanserif typefaces instead of serriffed ones. A detailed psychological analysis would be necessary in order to explain this patchy success, but as usual, musicians will be content with a more pragmatic approach...

The importance of being able to read whole groups of symbols as composite entities has been realised only in the last couple of decades (the lack of such entities in space–time notation is a major reason for its illegibility). It used to be thought that we read words letter by letter or understand language sound by sound, but it has become clear that the ability to make high level descriptions is crucial. In music notation, beams and ligatures assist in just such a function—how much easier it is to read



Beams create word-sized objects which are read as single entities. Bar-lines have a similar function at a higher level.

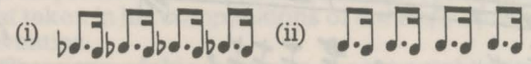
Consider the following series of composite symbols simply as a set of ink marks:



In the standard notation these diagrams obey a typographical rule, which states that they can be interchanged at will in the space between two imaginary vertical lines on the paper. Notice that note-heads require a discrete quantity of space, and that there is a characteristic minimum space into which each composite symbol will fit. Nowadays, when notating two such groups one above the other, every conscientious copyist will work out the order in which all the notes come in absolute time, and then ensure that the note-heads come in this order from left to right on the page, regardless of the tempo or any spatial considerations. This procedure is often accompanied by the feeling that he is doing something rather silly! In minimum horizontal space, and with awkwardly occurring chords and accidentals it can lead to situations like that shown in Example 3.

Since the function of a beam is to make a 'word' that is read as a single object, it seems curious that absolute time should have any particular significance within it. In such extreme cases all copyists will occasionally be satisfied with simply making sure that the outer verticals are correct. (I do not, however, recommend sloppy copying!) That the notation can remain legible, even in rather brutal circumstances, is one of the main reasons for its success. Such resilience can be observed in Example 4. Notice that this copyist thinks of bar-lines as enclosing packets of information, and that notes therefore tend to come in the middle of a bar, with the spaces between symbols being of no significance. A symbolic use of space developed during the course of the 19th century because the symbols themselves are not efficient enough in complicated music. In recent decades the space following a bar-line has often caused problems because these two ways of using space are not compatible.

The symbolic use of space is not, however, a simple matter, since the sizes of symbols and the physical confinement of a sheet of paper must be taken into account (as we have seen, the idea that space can be directly equivalent to time also contributed to the confusion surrounding 'subdivision'). Although the note-heads in the following examples are identically spaced, the spacing of (i) is correct in a constricted space, while (ii) is nowadays always incorrect.



Notice that we do not measure such spaces according to some absolute standard (we do not need a ruler to measure them or get them right), and that it would be incorrect always to reserve exactly 32 times as much space for a semibreve as for a demisemiquaver. In fact semibreves are nearly always shorter than that. This has to do with the way we read (whether we understand it or not) and the practicality of including as much information on the page as possible.

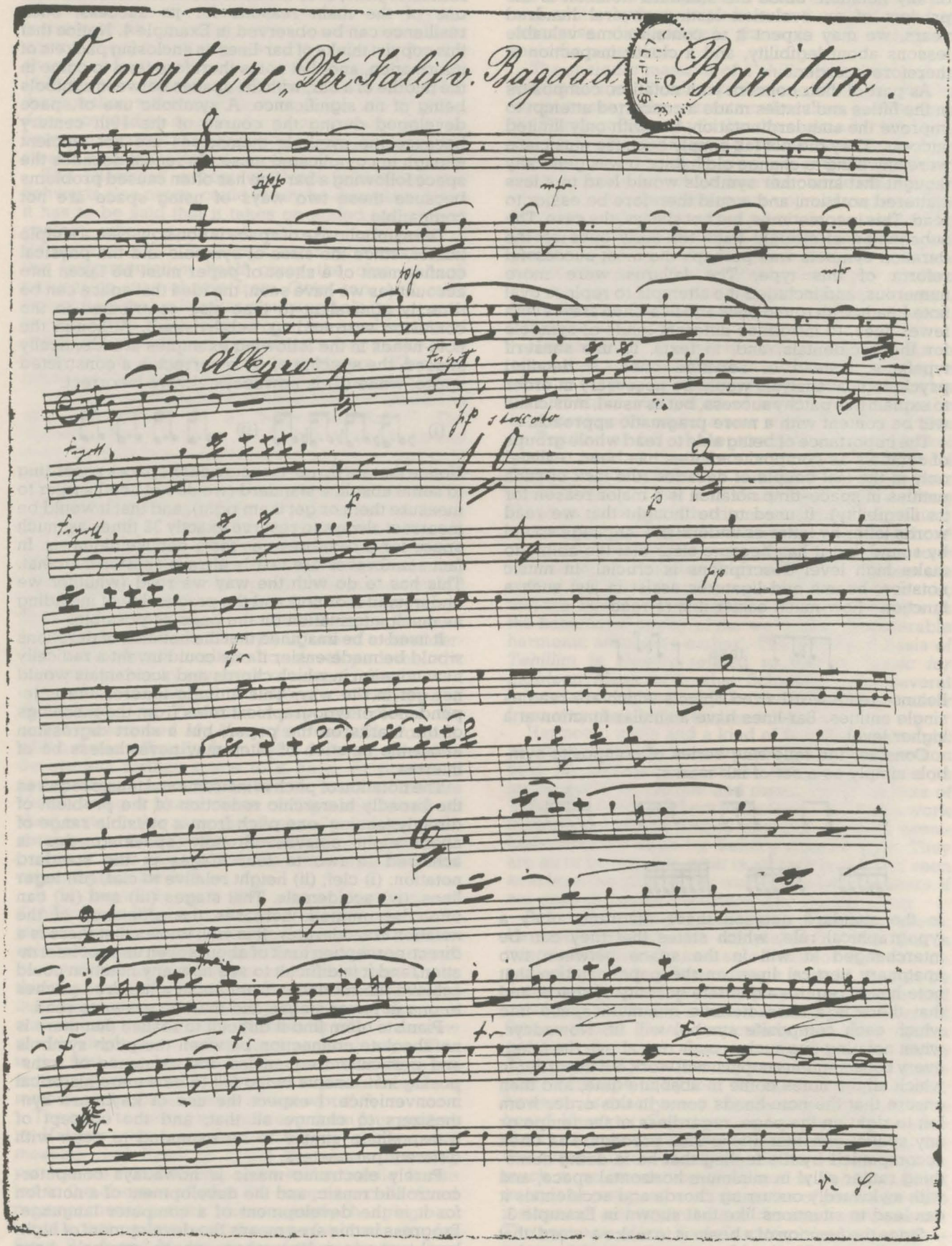
It used to be imagined that the notation of durations would be made easier if one could invent a radically new notation in which chords and accidentals would not get in the way. This attitude ignores the independence of typographical rules from the meanings of the marks on the paper, but a short digression about the notation of pitch may nevertheless be of interest.

The notation of pitch in instrumental music requires the broadly hierarchic reduction of the problem of directly 'seeing' one pitch from a possible range of about eight octaves. Broadly speaking, this is achieved in two to four stages in the standard notation: (i) clef, (ii) height relative to clef, (iii) leger lines, (iv) accidentals. That stages (iii) and (iv) can often be omitted increases the efficiency of the notation considerably. It is well known that there is a direct-perception limit of about seven units of information, and it is difficult to see how any notation could achieve the reduction from about a hundred pitches to one in fewer stages and thus be easier to read.

Pianists often find it difficult to realise that there is no absolute connection between the pitch symbols and particular frequencies, the existence of transposing instruments being felt to be a mere historical inconvenience. I expect the use of keyboard synthesizers to change all that, and the concept of transposition simply to be extended to cope with different parameters.

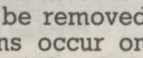
Purely electronic music is nowadays computer-controlled music, and the development of a notation for it is the development of a computer language. Progress in this area means the development of high-level computer languages, whose symbols have useful and intuitively graspable meanings for the users. There is no fundamental reason why the

Example 4 Adrien Boieldieu, *Le calife de Bagdad*, 1800 (19th-century copy)



symbols of such languages should be alphanumeric—indeed words and numbers have never been very good at describing musical objects. Incidentally, it should be remembered that computer specialists measure time in terms of the smallest repeatable unit that can be found (for example the single vibration of a particular crystal) and that time appears not to subdivide for them either! Machines can produce streams of equal time segments because those time segments are individually related to the machine's unchanging physical structure. Musicians, however, relate time to their short- and long-term memories rather than to the physical objects in their brains, and the circumstances under which they perform are therefore very different. The degree to which one can communicate with a computer in terms of less rigid time will, I think, be a good measure of its 'intelligence'.

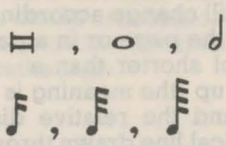
While the standard notation can boast a high degree of legibility, it must be said that its evolution has also resulted in some very doubtful accretions. These must now be examined and, where necessary, pruned away. I am attempting to produce a non-dualistic notation, so all metronome marks and other references to absolute time have to be dispensed with. Tempo is to be considered a local phenomenon which may or may not be used in a composition. It is not necessary, in a long series of supposedly equal time segments, to compare the first with the last—one need only compare them locally in order to experience tempo. The experience of a persistent tempo involves remembering that the experience of local tempo has itself persisted! This is an experience of a different order. Whether there is a tempo or not, the absolute tempo (measured by a stopwatch or a metronome) is redundant, since the units in terms of which the time will be measured or defined will be actual, recently performed, time segments. Such a concept of tempo is normal in performed music.

All references to subdivision ( etc.) should be removed because their use implies that durations occur only in rational proportions, and because it is meaningless to use such symbols in music that does not necessarily have a rigid tempo. It is no longer necessary to have symbols for fractional durations in order to make the bars add up in absolute time. Notice that while the use of a bracket to indicate irrational subdivisions such as the triplet is a recent invention, even the numeral was optional until the middle of the 19th century. As we have seen, the augmentation dots (♩.) are close relatives of the subdivision symbols and should therefore share their fate. These dots may have uses later, but for the moment let us regard their function as purely cosmetic and dispense with them.

The introduction of grace notes into the standard notation was a necessary expedient. In using them a composer says that he is unable to define the symbols in terms of either absolute or local time. It is unnecessary to consider them while formulating precise typographical rules for symbols that will be able to carry meaning in local time.

As we have seen, the space following a duration symbol has gradually increased in significance in order to increase the symbol's legibility. The space following a bar-line is not related to a duration and should therefore be abolished. The bar-lines themselves do, however, have important functions relating to legibility. They are convenient signposts for conductors, they break up the space into manageable units for the eyes, and they assist in general orientation at rehearsals. They will therefore remain, even though they will not retain all their original functions. The meanings of all symbols are to be considered freely composable.

Our textbooks are often rather vague about the number of duration symbols that exist:

 etc.

That there is potentially an infinite number of them was important at the end of the 17th century when, as we have seen, composers were replacing the ornament signs. In practice, of course, symbols such as

have never been used (even though they are members of the same group of symbols) because they are illegible and take up too much space on the page. Notes longer than a breve or a semibreve are still expressed using a symbol of a different type (the tie) and certain ornament signs (e.g. *tr*) are still used even though the duration symbols are capable of describing time segments of the same order of size. The duration symbols have therefore not been entirely successful in describing all kinds of musical objects. The use of the tie, combined with the (potentially infinitely small) duration symbols, means that we have symbols for durations extending infinitely in both directions away from the orders of size necessary for pieces of music. This seems excessive, and in my opinion the above series of symbols should be cut short at the short end. Needless to say, this has consequences.

Such drastic trimming necessitates a redefinition of the typographical rules for the remaining symbols. It is necessary that, after redefinition, the symbols behave in a way that resembles their previous behaviour as closely as possible. This will preserve their legibility and ensure that any confusion among players is kept to a minimum. Consider two fixed verticals on a sheet of paper, and use the 𝅝 to symbolise a note occupying that space. In standard notation four, five, six, or seven ♩ s can also occupy that spaces, and in general the numbers of symbols that can lie between the verticals (assuming the smallest symbol to be a ) are whole numbers lying between the following limits:

$$1 \leqslant \text{𝅝} < 2 \leqslant \text{𝅗𝅥} < 4 \leqslant \text{♩} < 8 \leqslant \text{♪} < 16$$

$$\leqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅯} < 32 \leqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅰} < 64 \leqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅱} < 128$$

As I have already shown, a major problem with the standard notation is that it can represent duration proportions only as the ratios of small whole numbers. If we now extend the definition of the symbols by allowing all real values (rational and irrational) between the above limits, this artificial barrier will be removed (for example, if there are 5.63 equally spaced notes in that space then they willbe ♩ s). It is clear that there are limits (having the proportion 1:2) on the space that can be occupied by any one symbol. If, for example, the verticals were 16 cm apart, then these limits would be (in cm):

$$16 \geqslant \text{𝅝} > 8 \geqslant \text{𝅗𝅥} > 4 \geqslant \text{♩} > 2 \geqslant \text{♪} > 1 \geqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅯}$$

$$> 0.5 \geqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅰} > 0.25 \geqslant \text{𝅘𝅥𝅱} > 0.125$$

Notice that a symbol does not define a distance but any particular distance is associated with a particular symbol.

These absolute limits will change according to the density of information on the page or in a particular bar. If there is no symbol shorter than a ♪ then everything can be closed up (the meaning is associated with the symbols and the relative distances between them), but a vertical line drawn through any point on the page will always pass through symbols and spaces that observe limits of this type (ratio 1:2) and in particular (in space):

all 𝅝 > all 𝅗𝅥 > all ♩ > all ♪

> all 𝅘𝅥𝅯 > all 𝅘𝅥𝅰 > all 𝅘𝅥𝅱

Notice that there are no absolute limits on the spatial distances associated with a particular symbol, and that these are as yet simply ink marks on paper, which can be replaced by other symbols (e.g. 𝄾 or 𝄿).

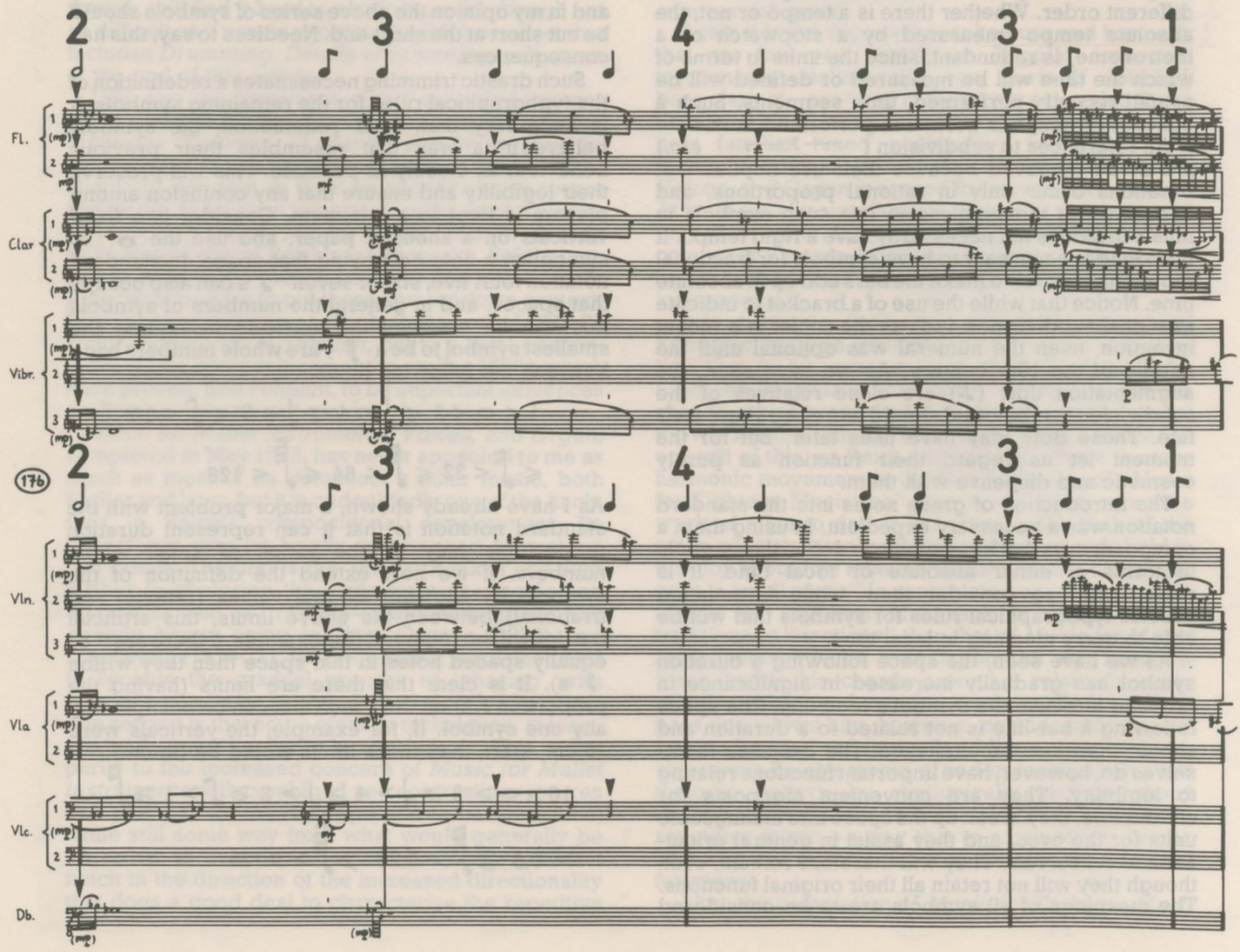
As I have already implied, I believe that the spatial position of notes within groups is of limited significance (because groups are read as a whole) and that flexibility of position at this level can be of great practical use. In this extended notation it is possible to find the duration class of a group by dividing the horizontal space occupied by the group as a whole by the number of notes. This also seems justified on the grounds that each single duration class should be defined by a single distance.

Given a sheet of paper sufficiently large for its physical limits to be ignored, it would be possible to give fixed, absolute values to the distance limits for each symbol, though such a procedure requires an inefficient use of space and is not particularly legible. If accidentals, note-heads, and flags are each 2 mm across, the shortest distance between the beginning of one

and the next will be at least 6 mm. This means that, while all real values greater than 6 mm can be converted into a combination of duration symbols and ties, no combination of symbols can be allowed to produce a distance of less than 6 mm since there is no available symbol. In the end this means that the space will have to be subdivided in some way, if all symbol positions are to be restricted to a 6 mm grid. The inner structure of any piece written in this notation will be deeply affected by the necessity for subdividing space while recognising the impossibility of subdividing time (Example 5).

While clear rules for the spatial arrangement of symbols are indispensable to the communication of information, it should not be imagined that the meanings associated with individual symbols will also be precisely definable. If we abandon the direct

Example 5 James Ingram, *beyond the symbolic*, 1982



relation of symbols to absolute time, there is no reason to assume that symbols devoid of context necessarily have any meaning at all. The uniqueness of any score lies in the contexts created by its symbols, and it is these contexts, re-created in sounds, that make the piece recognisable when the score is performed.

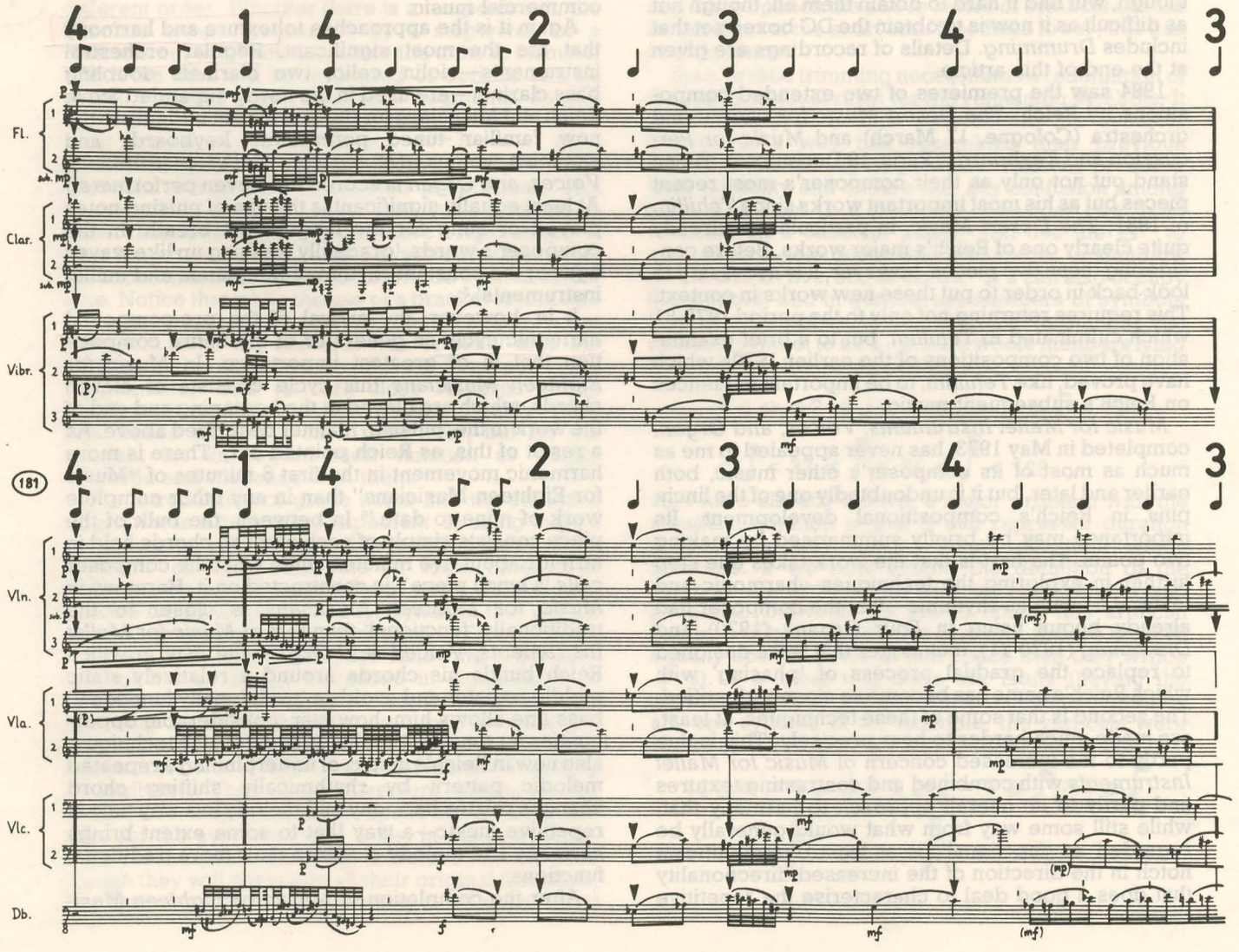
There is a very real sense in which high-level phenomena, associated with the overall way in which the symbols are combined, give information about details of performance practice, and for this reason it is usually possible for musicians to infer the exact meaning of a notation without having to read performance instructions. The use of such instructions should, ideally, save the player's time and give him a sense of security. While asserting that individual symbols do not have any intrinsic meaning, I do not want to appear to have avoided the issue of time itself, but it is, after all, the job of individual composers to provide the contexts that give the meanings.

A word of caution here: the forlorn hope that there could be an exact correspondence between notation and reality has caused much disappointment among composers, and has alienated many performers. It would, however, be equally wrong to think that the inability of notations to tell the whole truth provides an excuse for muddled composers to write unclearly, or for 'virtuosos' to treat scores with contempt. It is of crucial importance that composers use notations that are efficient and precise, but that do not impose unrealistic restrictions or tell actual untruths. I believe that the removal of spatial obstructions from the standard notation can have an effect no less dramatic on the articulation of time, than the removal of inner obstructions had on the spaces articulated by Gothic cathedrals.

[1] It is ironic that this symbol of heavenly perfection and divine will should have become for us a symbol of the negation of humanity.

[2] Mathematicians divide the real numbers into two classes, the rationals and the irrationals. The rational numbers are those that can be represented as the ratios of two whole numbers (e.g. $^2/_3$, $^5/_7$, 1.5 etc.). The irrationals are all those which cannot be so represented (e.g. $\sqrt{2}$, $\sqrt{3}$, Π etc.). The musical terminology is at variance with the mathematical, and in fact musicians ignore truly irrational numbers. This is not surprising, because such numbers cannot be added together and cannot therefore form part of the ideal world described by the standard notation. The notation is, even in principle, unable to describe all absolute, real time values.

[3] See Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1963); Eng. trans. by Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett, as *Boulez on Music Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), especially pp.91-4.



Keith Potter

The Recent Phases of Steve Reich

Before embarking on this article, readers might like to look at the list of works given at its end. The situation regarding Reich's recent scores is a little confusing, chiefly for three reasons. Firstly, three works exist in more than one version: in each case, the later one is more a rescoring of the original for either expanded or reduced forces than a radical reworking of the musical material. Secondly, the composer has in one instance retitled a new version rather than simply used the original title; and in at least one other instance he has allowed a title for a new work to circulate before changing his mind and calling it something else. Thirdly, Reich's music of the last few years is, inevitably perhaps, somewhat patchily known, even by the majority of his most enthusiastic admirers. While listeners in, say, New York have not unsurprisingly been able to hear most of the new works in live performances, those in, say, London have had no opportunity of hearing anything recent in concert performance since *Tehillim* except *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, a tape piece the origins of which actually go back to 1967. The situation regarding recordings is better: most of the recent works are now available on disc. Some, though, will find it hard to obtain them all; though not as difficult as it now is to obtain the DG boxed set that includes *Drumming*. Details of recordings are given at the end of this article.

1984 saw the premières of two extended compositions by Reich: *The Desert Music* for chorus and orchestra (Cologne, 17 March) and *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* (Paris, 19 December). These stand out not only as their composer's most recent pieces but as his most important works since *Tehillim* of 1981; *The Desert Music*, in particular, is already quite clearly one of Reich's major works. Before considering these two pieces, however, it is necessary to look back in order to put these new works in context. This requires returning not only to the period 1978-81 which culminated in *Tehillim*, but to a brief examination of two compositions of the earlier 1970s which have proved, like *Tehillim*, to be important influences on Reich's subsequent music.

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ, completed in May 1973, has never appealed to me as much as most of its composer's other music, both earlier and later, but it is undoubtedly one of the linchpins in Reich's compositional development. Its importance may be briefly summarised by making two points. The first is that the work takes one step further in exploring the techniques—harmonic and textural as well as rhythmic—that the composer had already begun using in *Four Organs* (1970) and *Drumming* (1970-71); techniques that were designed to replace the gradual process of 'phasing' with which Reich's name has become so closely identified. The second is that some of these techniques, at least, are made much harder to hear precisely. This is due partly to the increased concern of *Music for Mallet Instruments* with combined and contrasting textures and partly to an overall approach to harmony that, while still some way from what would generally be regarded as 'functional', is at least one significant notch in the direction of the increased directionality that does a good deal to characterise the repetitive music of the last ten years or so.

The immediate effect of *Music for Mallet Instruments* is, I think, its harmonic and textural sumptuousness; some might call it 'Romantic', others merely 'commercial'.[1] An important element in this is the doubling of electric organ and women's voices; another is the use of this 'new timbre which is both instrumental and vocal at the same time'[2] as the protagonist in an extended process of augmentation and diminution of sustained notes, a technique the composer had first employed in *Four Organs*. It is the combination of longer note values and the post-phasing rhythmic techniques used up to then in pieces consisting largely of short time values that K. Robert Schwartz implies is most responsible for the reputation of *Music for Mallet Instruments* as 'a breakthrough piece'.[3]

Even more important in terms of Reich's later development, however, is *Music for Eighteen Musicians* which, completed in March 1976, occupied its composer for most of the previous two years. Schwartz proclaims that the composition 'clearly delineates the beginning of a new style period within Reich's output; it is also the work that was most influential in establishing Reich's name before a mass public'.[4] The second part of this statement seems almost as significant as the first. Among other things it goes some way towards explaining how the work has come to have such a widespread influence on young composers in the late seventies and early eighties—both on those whose approach derives fairly directly from the old 'experimental music' and on those who come to it via avant-garde 'texture music' or even commercial music.

Again it is the approaches to texture and harmony that are the most significant. Regular orchestral instruments—violin, cello, two clarinets doubling bass clarinet—are used in the newly expanded Steve Reich and Musicians for the first time in addition to the now familiar tuned percussion, keyboards and women's voices. (*Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* is scored for eleven performers.) At least equally significant is the use of pulsing notes played or sung for the length of a breath: in the composer's words, 'gradually washing up like waves against the constant rhythm of the pianos and mallet instruments'.[5]

It is, however, the arrival of the pre-composed harmonic cycle as generator of the entire composition that is of greatest importance. In *Music for Eighteen Musicians* this cycle consists of eleven chords, which are played at the beginning and end of the work in the 'pulsing' manner described above. As a result of this, as Reich pointed out, 'There is more harmonic movement in the first 5 minutes of "Music for Eighteen Musicians" than in any other complete work of mine to date.'[6] In between, the bulk of the piece consists simply of each of these chords held in turn for about five minutes while what the composer calls 'a small piece'[7] is constructed on it. Harmony in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* is closer to the traditionally 'functional' than that of *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*; the way in which Reich builds his chords around a relatively static middle register and avoids a 'traditionally functional' bass line allows him, however, considerable opportunities for tonal ambiguity. In addition, the technique, also new in Reich's music, of underpinning a repeated melodic pattern by rhythmically shifting chord changes relates harmony and melody in a way new in repetitive music—a way that to some extent brings harmony and melody closer to their more traditional functions.

After the completion of *Music for Eighteen Musi-*

cians there is something of a break in Reich's output until we get to three pieces which follow each other in fairly quick succession between the end of 1978 and 1979. These three works—*Music for a Large Ensemble*, *Octet*, and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*—not only form a chronologically close and in some respects compositionally related group; they also lead fairly directly to what is undoubtedly the next major and 'breakthrough' piece: *Tehillim*, not completed until August 1981.

Music for a Large Ensemble, completed in December 1978, follows the tendency that by now seemed built into its composer's development: the increase in size of ensemble and concomitant range of sonorities. 'The instrumental forces are the largest I have ever used', Reich wrote at the time, 'and include all the orchestral families, plus women's voices.'[8] While large, the ensemble required is, however, far from the traditional orchestral complement: the instrumentation is essentially a natural expansion of that used in *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. At its centre are the familiar tuned percussion and pianos (eleven players altogether); six strings and a wind group (including, notably, four trumpets) are joined by two female voices. *Music for a Large Ensemble* may be the first repetitive piece Reich wrote for musicians other than those of his own group, but the piece was seemingly easily adapted for Steve Reich and Musicians soon afterwards; the original version now appears to have been withdrawn.

Stylistically and technically, the work is simply 'a development'[9] of *Music for Mallet Instruments* and *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. From the former come, among other things, the process of augmentation and diminution, now seemingly related to the repeating-melody shifting-chords technique of the latter. The trumpets are confined to sustained chordal passages beginning in the middle of each of the four sections of the piece; these are based on Reich's continued 'interest in the human breath as the measure of musical duration',[10] but without the pulsing that went with it in *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

Music for a Large Ensemble seemed a considerable disappointment at the time and I still think it so now. *Octet* and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* are much better and more interesting pieces; with the benefit of at least a little hindsight, it may be said that the reason for this is that both the later works exhibit much more clearly Reich's developing interest in melody and, in the case of *Variations* more particularly, with a more 'functional' approach to harmony. The tendencies towards more sustained and clear-cut melodic writing and tonality are perhaps the most interesting aspects of the composer's development to the present.

One could, in fact, trace at least the origins of this apparently new concern with melodic line as far back as one wishes. The introduction of voices in *Drumming* and *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* had in a sense already signalled Reich's interest in, as it were, 'lyrical processes' as well as rhythmic ones. More significantly, I think, the way in which Reich varies the effect of a constant melodic pattern in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* by changing the harmonic rhythm underneath it increases the sense that there *is* a melody to be heard. It is interesting to observe, too, that in his notes for this work, the composer suggests that canonic procedure is simply another sort of phasing; he refers to 'The process of building up a canon, *or phase relation*, between two xylophones and two pianos which first occurs in section 2' (the italics are mine).[11] So far as I am aware at present, this is the first reference Reich makes to something which in all probability had already been in his mind for some time: the fact that 'phasing' as he used it in the late sixties and early seventies is simply a special case of canon. Thinking in canonic terms inevitably gives rise to more traditional notions of counterpoint in which the generating force is the melodic line.

There is, though, a reason why melody became important for Reich at the time it did. During the relatively 'fallow' years of 1976 and 1977 his main musical preoccupation, aside from increasingly successful tours with his group, was the beginning of an investigation of his own Jewish heritage. Reich's new interest in Hebrew, the Torah, and—in terms of purely musical influence naturally the most important—in traditional cantillation systems and their notation brought another dimension to the expansion of his range of techniques and ways of thinking that, in retrospect, seems to have been necessary at that time. And while in one sense Jewish music can simply be added to the list of 'non-classical' influences that have helped to shape Reich's work into the original contribution to 20th-century music that it is, the nature of the source in this case acts to pull his musical development in a direction quite different even from that taken in his compositions of the early and middle seventies.

The signs of this influence—most notably the new interest in expanded melodic line—can even be seen to a limited extent in *Music for a Large Ensemble*. The writing for violins and clarinets around the middle of each of the four sections of the piece is still 'composed of smaller melodic patterns', as its composer says,[12] but is arguably heard in a more continuous fashion than any melodic patterns in Reich's earlier music. Besides, he himself draws attention to the connection between this new method of folding together small units that would formerly have been more separate and repetitive and the cantillation of Hebrew scriptures, 'the technique of which,' he says, 'is the putting together of small motives to make long melodic lines that make sense of the sacred text'.[13] In context, however, this intermittent focus on line is swamped by the work's textural and harmonically undirected blandness.

Octet, completed in April 1979, and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*, finished in December the same year, make much more interesting as well as more expanded use of what is basically only the same kind of melodic technique. The flute solo at Figure 3c, for instance—a lively ten bars outlining a slow descent, finished off with an ascending flourish so as to return to the higher notes for the repeat—is just the start of a longish sequence in which melody etches itself clearly against the familiar constant rhythmic chatter. The latter is in this case provided not by the tuned percussion that has become such a trademark in Reich's music, but by two piano parts of an almost legendary difficulty: 'the result,' the composer says, 'of years of writing for those mallet percussion instruments is transferred to the keyboard, so that there is some rather complex rhythmic interlocking going on between the two pianos which generates the rhythm for the entire *Octet*'.[14]

The overall effect of *Octet* is of greater focus, even of concision. The instrumentation—a string quartet and two 'doubling' woodwind players in addition to the two pianos—could almost be described as 'classical', and is a welcome antidote to the apparent assumption that bigger means better. Even the arrangement that Ransom Wilson has made of the piece for chamber orchestra, which goes under the title *Eight Lines*, seems to convey an impression of

clarity and precision. *Octet*'s harmonic language has been compared to that of *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*,[15] but even though the chordal vocabulary is somewhat similar, the total effect seems to me quite different: it's not only the instrumentation that keeps these chords under tight control. At under 18 minutes, *Octet* is one of Reich's shorter recent works, too; indeed, all three works of 1978-9 move quite rapidly and less repetitively through their material. At the same time, clarity of line does not lead to clarity of structure, since changes between sections are achieved seamlessly, almost by stealth: concision leading to elision.

The 'classical' aspect of *Octet*, something that Schwartz also notes, could easily be overplayed, but it has to be said that it takes on added meaning in context when compared with the approach of *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*. Again the instrumentation itself gives the clue: though percussion was absent from *Octet* too, and even though he uses his familiar pianos and electric organs to double the flutes and oboes, the combination of orchestral sounds and slower pace brings the new work much closer to a 'mainstream Western' approach than Reich had perhaps ever come before.

Structurally, *Variations* is what Michael Steinberg aptly describes as a 'mega-chaconne'.[16] The harmonic basis is more 'functional' than previously even though the chaconne's harmonic cycle is worked through only three times in the course of 22 minutes, each 'variation' presenting a more active surface to the music than the last. *Variations* picks up the influence of *Music for Eighteen Musicians* in terms of harmonic structure and harmonic motion much more than do the intervening two pieces, using each chord in the chaconne progression in something like the 'stretched' manner of the earlier work. Melodically, too, *Variations* comes closer to Western models; the effect, Reich says, is 'one of a considerably more florid, melismatic, developed melodic vocabulary than in any work of mine to date'.[17]

Between *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* and *Tehillim* comes one piece: the already-mentioned *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, which dates officially from 1980. I do not intend to devote any further space to it here. At present it seems like a throwback to Reich's music of the late 1960s, being a phase piece on tape and based on short texts (in this case, the names of members of the composer's own group). Reich calls it a 'work in progress' and has said he has more ambitious and original plans for it.[18]

It is inevitably with the overtly Jewish-based *Tehillim* that Reich's tendencies towards more sustained and clear-cut melodic writing make themselves most felt; to a considerable extent this is true of its development of harmony and tonality too. These things are set off not only by the natural extension of the composer's immediately preceding involvement with melody and harmony, but also by what is the new work's single most radical step: as Reich says, 'This is the first time I have set a text to music since my student days and the result is a piece based on melody in the basic sense of that word'.[19]

The need to set the text (extracts from four psalms in Hebrew) 'in accordance with its rhythm *and* meaning' led Reich to avoid the short repeating patterns so characteristic of his earlier music. It also led to the absence of what the composer calls 'fixed meter or metric pattern'; the constantly changing barlengths that necessitated the use of a conductor for Steve Reich and Musicians for, I think, the first time probably constitute the other most radical step in *Tehillim*. On the other hand, as Smith suggests, perhaps this aspect of the new work is overplayed by its composer: there is a continuous fast pulse throughout, despite the presence of 'the first slow movement I have composed since my student days', and while rhythmic repetition in the old sense has otherwise disappeared, there is still plenty of melodic repetition.

The melodic material of *Tehillim* is not based on Jewish themes; Reich says that one of the reasons he chose to set psalm extracts rather than, say, parts of the Torah or Prophets 'is that the oral tradition among Jews in the West for singing Psalms has been lost'. He has in fact managed to compose extended melodic structures entirely of his own that, while still subject to a good deal of repetition, are not made up even like the folding fragments of the other pieces inspired by Jewish cantillation techniques; their combination and proliferation are effected by techniques that are essentially canonic. Schwartz's summary is apt: 'we are dealing with genuine melodic material', he says, 'fully-formed melody, conceived as an integral, independent entity'.[20]

Harmonically, *Tehillim* is interesting as well. As so often, the composer's own notes on the piece give clues to his way of thinking that go beyond even his own succinct summaries of what he considers the important points about a new work. The sleeve note to *Tehillim* is full of the straightforward technical terms used to describe and analyse traditional Western tonal music. '. . . ending in a crystal clear A major triad . . . set in C sharp minor with a strong G natural (lowered fifth, tritone or diabolus in musica) . . . later harmonized with an altered A dominant chord . . . to suggest that the G natural may be a leading tone to a G sharp Phrigian [sic] mode . . .': these are typical.[21] It is no surprise to read, in the light of this, that the 'last movement affirms the key of D major as the basic tonal center of the work after considerable harmonic ambiguity earlier'. The structural basis of *Tehillim* is closely related to that of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*: what Schwartz calls 'several interrelated harmonic cycles'[22] are used in a rather freer way than in the earlier work.

Harmonic cycle and a kind of functional harmony; traditional melodic invention and canonic elaboration of it; the setting of a text and the acceptance of its implications for rhythm and metre: these aspects of *Tehillim*, several of them to be found in Reich's work from the middle seventies onwards anyway, seemingly form the basis for Reich's present style. They are all to be found in what is already becoming seen as at least the other major work of the last five years, if not even the more important: *The Desert Music*.

Before this, though, comes one other short piece: *Vermont Counterpoint*, completed in 1982. This is intended principally as a solo work for flute accompanied by ten other flutes on tape; it could, though, be done by eleven live flute players—colleges and university music departments with large numbers of flutes, please note, particularly the flute choirs common in some American institutions. (*Violin Phase*, of 1967, can likewise be done either as a solo piece with tape or by four violinists; neither version, however, is exactly easy.) On the only occasion I have heard *Vermont Counterpoint* I enjoyed its relative clarity of contrapuntal textures and purpose, but felt that essentially the piece only dallies with ideas given much more interesting treatment in *Tehillim*. Reich intends to compose a whole series of pieces for solo instrument and tape/choir of the same instruments. The next one—*New York Counterpoint* for clarinet—is currently in progress and is already scheduled for its première on 6 December 1985 at Avery Fisher Hall, New York City.

Reich worked on *The Desert Music* for chorus and orchestra from September 1982 to December 1983. The work takes its title from a book of collected poems by William Carlos Williams, who, intriguingly, is one of three poets whom Reich mentions in *Writings* as particular interests of his in the early sixties, when he 'tried, from time to time, to set their poems to music, always without success'.[23] His 'first compositional activity'[24] in the present instance was to choose parts of several different poems for setting, including in the end a small part of a poem from a different collection. The use of an English-language text is entirely new in Reich's mature, 'repetitive' music, and as with the Hebrew psalm texts of *Tehillim*, he sets the words in a manner somewhat resembling the Western traditional notion of the term 'setting'. (The early, pioneering phase pieces using English words—*It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966)—as well as *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, are derived entirely from their spoken texts in a unique and experimental way.)

The other notably new aspect of *The Desert Music* is its sheer scope; it was claimed to be Reich's largest-scale work. Not only is it a little longer than *Tehillim*, itself considerably longer, I think, than anything he had composed since *Music for Eighteen Musicians*; more importantly, the number of performers involved and the work's expressive range give some substance to the claim made by Boosey and Hawkes, his new publishers, that *The Desert Music* 'stands as a summation of his compositional activity to date'.

The choral forces required by the work are confined to a fairly modest two or three dozen mixed voices in eight parts (much larger than Reich had ever asked for before, however). But the orchestra is 87 strong: quadruple woodwind and brass, two timpanists doubling on roto-toms, six other percussionists, four pianists at two pianos, and 47 strings. In actual performance the extent to which Reich still relies on a central core of tuned percussion and pianos is made even clearer by the use of members of his own group. In Cologne, four of them did a good deal to hold a somewhat shaky performance together. At the American première performances in Brooklyn in October 1984, on which the forthcoming record is based, the composer's ensemble took an even larger part, I think.

More importantly, though, the Brooklyn performances made Reich all the more certain that he had finally solved the problem of writing his own kind of music in an orchestrally idiomatic way that serves his style rather than hinders it. One significant reason for this was the way in which the string players were regrouped as three separate orchestras; the strings have a lot of tricky polyrhythmic canons to perform and traditional grouping on the platform makes these even harder. The solution to this problem results in a much better performance, as I was able to hear from a tape. Reich seems justified in regarding *The Desert Music* as a significant step forward in terms of his orchestral writing; he now thinks both *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* and the orchestral version of *Tehillim* to be simply steps along the road.

The Desert Music draws fully on the expressive meaning of Williams's poetry in ways that are sometimes surprisingly direct. The opening fast movement, for instance, sets the first of the six lines the composer has selected from a poem entitled *Theocritus: Idyll 1 —A version from the Greek* as a typically repeating structure, suggesting an approach quite alien to traditional notions of 'word setting'. But the other five lines receive a straightforward and non-repetitive treatment in simple block chords, the repeating elements being left to the orchestra.

Both this poem and *The Orchestra*, from which the words for the second, third and fourth movements are taken, come from Williams's collection which gives Reich's piece its name. The second and fourth share both a moderate tempo and the same text: both the words themselves and the use of wordless vocalise in these two movements suggest what Reich himself calls the 'constant flickering of attention between what words mean and how they sound when set to music' which is apparently a central concern of *The Desert Music*. 'Well,' the poem reads, 'Shall we/think or listen? Is there a sound addressed/not wholly to the ear?'

The central third movement's slow outer sections present an essentially straightforward setting of a passage reflecting the poet's concern about the atom bomb. The middle section, on the other hand, in the tempo of the second and fourth movements, moves from rhythmic unison to vocal canons and thereby to the light fantastic kaleidoscope of constantly changing metres familiar from *Tehillim*. The words here are appropriately reflexive but slightly odd in the context of the movement as a whole: 'it is a principle of music/ to repeat the theme. Repeat/and repeat again,/as the pace mounts . . .' The final movement in this continuous 49-minute arch structure returns to the fast tempo of the first, but sets a text taken from another collection altogether: a poem called *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*.

Reich himself describes the musical techniques used in *The Desert Music* as a combination of those to be found in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* and *Tehillim*. I have already mentioned the constantly changing metres of the latter as an influence on the new work; extensive use of canonic structures, particularly in the orchestral parts, is another. From *Music for Eighteen Musicians* comes the use of harmonic cycles presented in the form of pulsing chords constantly rising and falling in dynamic; the harmony, though, as the composer himself points out, is darker and more chromatic than in the earlier work. Other aspects of *The Desert Music*—notably the extensive doubling of the vocal parts and the use of amplification—are more generally familiar from Reich's earlier music.

The Desert Music points up, even more than his other music of the last ten or so years, the extent to which Reich now thinks in much more traditionally Western terms than before. In the workshop sessions he gave at the American Center in Paris in connection with the performances of *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* (of which more in a moment) he talked a great deal about harmony. It is very noticeable that his references are now more likely to be to Debussy or Bartók than to Javanese gamelan or Pérotin. He feels a strong and perhaps increasing kinship with Debussy, whose non-'functional' but dominant-quality harmony now seems very close to his own, particularly in terms of tonal ambiguity. In the past he has cheerfully related his use of a kind of chordal suspension technique in *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* to a study of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto.[25] In present-day terms, at least in 'avant-garde' terms, he argues, 'I am a harmonic conservative.' 'Major, minor, Dorian: these are my big three', he says. Reich himself regards *Tehillim* as his most traditional piece; partly, I think, because the pauses between its four parts make him think of it in terms of movements and classical forms. He still in fact prefers the concentration and sense of focus created by a single-movement span; nowadays, though, he cites Bartók's Third String Quartet as a

model in this respect. In this light, Smith's comparison of *Tehillim* with Stravinsky, and in particular he feels with *Les noces*, seems perfectly natural.[26]

Music for Percussion and Keyboards, composed in 1984, is intended in the first instance for the Canadian percussion group Nexus. Four percussionists perform variously on marimbas, vibraphones, bass drums, crotales, a tam-tam, and—briefly in the interests of establishing a new tempo, primarily I think—on percussion beaters themselves. There are also, however, two keyboard players who double on pianos and synthesizers. It was apparently Reich's original intention to compose keyboard parts simple enough for the percussionists themselves to play, but things got out of hand and he has had to call in two specialists.

Especially in view of this, writing for a slightly expanded Nexus is not, of course, very different from writing for Reich's own Musicians; the two groups even have players in common. *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* is in fact also intended for touring with the smaller version of the composer's ensemble, which has been starved of new pieces since Reich's increasing fame allowed him to expand his forces to match.

Structurally, as in several other respects, this latest composition is rather similar to *The Desert Music*. Five sections are played continuously to form an ABCBA arch using three harmonic cycles; the tempo moves from fast to the central slow section and back to fast via the moderatos of the second and fourth. The relatively long first section is typically Reichian in its woody, continuous chatter, but after this the textures become generally sparer. The second section makes extensive and interesting play with more sustained notes on bowed vibraphones—a technique that had already appeared in the first section. This attempt to overcome the problem of the relatively short duration of percussion sounds is but the most recent example of Reich's successful integration of more sustained melodic lines into his music. The texture of this section is also quite original, not only because of the sustained vibraphone sounds with their little built-in crescendi and diminuendi on each note, but because the rather lumbering, dry piano parts and the eerie punctuation of the bass drums offset them in an interesting way.

On the other hand, the synthesizer melody of the fourth section, using the same harmonic cycle as that of the second, seems contrived and out of place against the dry, repeated vibraphone chords. The single stroke on the tam-tam near the end of the performance, though, is masterly.

Music for Percussion and Keyboards is not, I think, as important in Reich's output as *The Desert Music*, though at almost exactly half an hour in duration it must rank in at least one sense as Reich's other most substantial work since *Tehillim*. It may be that I was inclined to underestimate it partly because Nexus's Paris performances in the Pompidou Centre were at an early and uncharacteristically rough stage; the circumstances of the performances were not ideal either. The piece itself also had an unpolished air about it in some respects, most notably when it ended abruptly without completing its last harmonic cycle. On the other hand, even the relatively poor Cologne performance of *The Desert Music* made the very considerable qualities of the work quite clear.[27]

Reich himself pointed out in Paris that *Tehillim* at present represents something of an extreme point in his music, being what he called 'straightforwardly melodic'. And while *The Desert Music* retains a clear

melodic impetus, but 'less so', as the composer said, *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* is 'more verging towards pattern' once more. Yet he also already saw the possibility that the importance of melody in his work might go in waves, as it were. He suggested that the new clarinet and tape piece he is to write for Richard Stolzman, *New York Counterpoint*, might well be much more overtly melodic again, as befits an essentially solo piece. I wonder how Reich's recent involvement with melody would stand the test of a *purely* solo work . . .

[1] For a view inclining to the latter see Dave Smith's review, in *Contact 24* (Spring 1982), p.34, of the September 1981 London concert by Steve Reich and Musicians that included *Octet* and *Tehillim* as well as *Music for Mallet Instruments*. This occasion, by the way, was the last time the composer's own group performed in Britain.

[2] Reich, *Writings about Music* (Halifax, Canada: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/London: Universal Edition, 1974), p.70.

[3] 'Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, part II', *Perspectives of New Music*, vol.20 (1981/1982), p.241. The first part of Schwartz's article appears in *PNM*, vol.19 (1980/1981), pp.373-92. This two-part survey of Reich's development up to *Tehillim* is the best I have seen, even though it leans heavily (and not always with full acknowledgement) on the composer's own *Writings* and on descriptions of later pieces in programme notes, etc.

[4] Schwartz, op. cit., p.244.

[5] Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for a Large Ensemble*.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

[12] Wayne Alpern, 'An Interview with Steve Reich', *New York Arts Journal*, vol.17 (1980), p.17, as quoted in Schwartz, op. cit, p.252.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Smith, op. cit.

[16] Sleeve notes to the recording of *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*.

[17] Alpern, op. cit., p.18; quoted in Schwartz, op. cit., pp.257-58.

[18] Schwartz, op. cit., pp.260-62.

[19] This and the following four quotations are taken from the sleeve notes to the recording of *Tehillim*.

[20] Schwartz, op. cit., pp.263, 264.

[21] This and the following quotation are taken from the sleeve notes to the recording of *Tehillim*.

[22] Schwartz, op. cit., p.264.

[23] *Writings about Music*, p.49.

[24] *Reich, programme note for The Desert Music.*

[25] See Schwartz, op. cit., p.257.

[26] See Smith, op. cit.

[27] This article had already reached proof stage when I learned that Reich had produced what sounds like an extensively revised version of *Music for Percussion and Keyboards*; he has also given it the new title, *Sextet*. By the time this article appears in print, the first performances will have been given by Nexus on its European spring tour. The American première will be given at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the autumn when it will be choreographed by Laura Dean; the US concert première will be given in the New York programme on 6 December that also includes *New York Counterpoint*. There are plans for a British première in early 1986.

Works, 1978-84

Music for a Large Ensemble, completed December 1978. Commissioned: Holland Festival. First performance: Netherlands Wind Ensemble, cond. Reinbert de Leeuw, June 1979. Forces: uncertain. (In his sleeve note to the recording of the version for his own group, Reich writes: 'During the fall and winter of 1979, while rehearsing with my own ensemble, the piece was extensively revised. The middle section was removed, shortening the piece from about 21 to about 16 minutes; two violas were added, which made it necessary to changes [sic] notes in the women's voices, violins and soprano saxophones; a flute was removed; and the tempo was increased from about 184 beats per minute to about 212.' A good idea of the original 'large ensemble' can be gained from the instrumentation of the revised version shown below, plus the information above. It may be noted that Schwartz's list of instruments (*PNM*, vol.20, p.251) does not tally with that drawn from the record sleeve.)

Revised version, fall-winter 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians (?without conductor), Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. Forces: flute, 2 clarinets, 2 soprano saxophones, 4 trumpets, 4 marimbas, 2 xylophones, vibraphone, 4 pianists, 2 female voices, 2 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, 2 double basses; winds, pianos, voices, and strings amplified.

Octet, completed April 1979. Commissioned: Radio Frankfurt (Hessischer Rundfunk). First performance: Netherlands Wind Ensemble, cond. Reinbert de Leeuw, Hessischer Rundfunk, 21 June 1979. Forces: 2 clarinets doubling flutes and bass clarinets, 2 pianos, 2 violins, viola, cello; amplification optional. (At the première there were four woodwind players.)

Revised version, fall-winter 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians (without conductor), Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. (Reich writes in his sleeve note to the recording of this version that 'while rehearsing with my own ensemble the piece was revised to include piccolo and the tempo was slightly increased.')

Version for chamber orchestra, entitled *Eight Lines*, arranged Ransom Wilson, ?1983. First performance: Solisti New York, cond. Ransom Wilson, 92nd Street Y, New York, 10 December 1983. Forces: 6 winds, 2 pianos, 8 violins, 4 violas, 4 cellos, double bass. (According to Allan Kozinn's sleeve note to the recording of this version, the double bass part is drawn from the cello and bass clarinet lines.)

Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards, completed December 1979. Commissioned: San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. First performance: SFSO, cond. Edo de Waart, May 1980. Forces: 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 pianos, 3 electric organs, strings.

Revised version, 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians, (?without conductor) Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. Forces: 25 performers.

My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait, ?1980-81. (Based on *My Name Is*, for three or more tape recorders, performers, and audience (1967). Two performances of this are listed in *Writings about Music*, p.73, but it is otherwise unmentioned there. Described by Schwartz (p.260).) First performance: Whitney Museum, New York, 6 January 1981. (On this occasion the piece began with the eight performers of Steve Reich and Musicians on whose names this realisation was based stepping forward to microphones and introducing themselves before the tape began.)

Tehillim ('Psalms'), completed 18 August 1981. Commissioned: jointly by West German Radio, Cologne, South German Radio, Stuttgart, and Rothko Chapel, Houston. First performance: (first two parts only) South German Radio Orchestra, cond. Peter Eötvös, June 1981; (complete) Steve Reich and Musicians, cond. George Manatian, West German Radio, Cologne, ?September 1981. Text: setting in Hebrew of extracts from four Biblical psalms: Part One, Psalm 19:2-5 (1-4 in King James Version); Part Two, Psalm 34:13-15 (12-14 in King James Version); Part Three, Psalm 18:26-7; Part Four, Psalm 150:4-6. Forces: 4 female voices (high soprano, 2 lyric sopranos, alto), piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, 6 percussionists (maracas, clapping, tuned tambourines without jingles, marimba, vibraphone, crotales), 2 electric organs, 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass; winds, voices, and strings amplified.

Version for orchestra. First performance: New York Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Zubin Mehta, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, 16 September 1982. Forces: 4 female voices (as above), piccolo, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 4 clarinets, bassoon, 6 percussionists (as above), 2 electric organs, strings in five parts; winds, voices, and strings amplified.

Vermont Counterpoint, 1982. Commissioned: Ransom Wilson. First performance: Ransom Wilson, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, 1 October 1982. Forces: flute, tape; or 11 flutes.

The Desert Music, September 1982-December 1983. Commissioned: jointly by West German Radio, Cologne, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York. First performance: West German Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, cond. Peter Eötvös, West German Radio, Cologne, 17 March 1984. Forces: 27 mixed voices in 8 parts (SSAATTBB), 4 flutes (3 doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (3 doubling cor anglais), 4 clarinets (3 doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons doubling contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets (1 doubling piccolo trumpet (optional)), 3 trombones, tuba, 4 pianists (2 pianos), 7 percussionists (6 if timpanist assists), 2 timpanists doubling roto-toms, strings (12,12,9,9,6); woodwinds and voices amplified.

Music for Percussion and Keyboards (originally announced as *Five Lines*), 1984. Commissioned: Pompidou Centre, Paris. First performance: Nexus, Pompidou Centre, Paris, 19 December 1984. Forces: 4 percussionists (3 marimbas, 2 vibraphones, 2 bass drums, crotales, percussion beaters, tam-tam), 2 pianists doubling synthesizers; amplification.

Revised version, ?December 1984-?January 1985. First performance: announced as Nexus, Helsinki, 10 March 1985. ('Substantial' alterations to the original version, according to Reich, but, so far as I am aware, the same instrumentation.)

Recordings of works, 1973-84

All discs devoted entirely to performances of Reich by the composer's own ensemble unless otherwise stated.

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ (together with *Six Pianos*, also 1973) was originally issued as part of a DG boxed set devoted primarily to *Drumming*: DG 2740 106 (1974). This is now deleted, but *Music for Mallet Instruments* and *Six Pianos* are still available separately as DG Privilege 2535 463 (cassette 3335 463). (When I was in Paris last December for *Music for Percussion and Keyboards*, I found a copy of the boxed set in the FNAC department store; other copies may still be unsold on shelves somewhere.)

Music for Eighteen Musicians, ECM 1129 (1978)

Music for a Large Ensemble, *Octet* (with *Violin Phase*), ECM-1-1168 (1980)

Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards (original orchestral version) (with John Adams, *Shaker Loops*), San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, cond. Edo de Waart, Philips 412 214-1 (1984)

Tehillim, ECM 1215 (1982)

Vermont Counterpoint (with Philip Glass, *Facades* (arranged for two flutes and strings); Frank Becker, *Stonehenge*; Debussy, *Syrinx*; André Jolivet, *Ascèses (1)*), Ransom Wilson (flute), EMI Angel DS-37340 (1982) (import only)

Eight Lines (chamber orchestral version of *Octet* made by Ransom Wilson) (with John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*), Solisti New York, cond. Ransom Wilson, EMI Angel DS-37345 (1984) (import only)

The Desert Music, Steve Reich and Musicians with chorus and members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Michael Tilson Thomas, Nonesuch, due for release in summer 1985.

The Desert Music will receive its British première at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert on 29 July 1985.

Trevor Wishart

An Alternative Voice

Istvan Anhalt, *Alternative Voices* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), £29.75; distributed in the UK by I.D.B. Ltd, 66 Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead

Of all the people who plan structures in the domain of vocal sound, or who cause such events to occur, only a few normally call themselves composers. The others profess to be working as vocal performers, playwrights, actors, stage-directors, poets, media sound-effects persons, clergymen, linguists, lawyers, Inuit shamans, sound-engineers, psychologists, announcers, advertising specialists, auctioneers and so on. (p.151)

This would seem an appropriate quotation with which to introduce one of the most informative and seminal books on music I have read for many years. Istvan Anhalt's *Alternative Voices*, the result of ten years of continuous research into vocal music, sets out to place contemporary developments in the musical use of the voice in the much broader historical and cultural context of human utterance in general.

For those nurtured on a score-based analytic approach to musical structure this may initially smack of sociological generalism. Far from it, however.

The art of a Chaliapin, or a Guilbert, or, for that matter, a Janis Joplin, makes it clear that to penetrate beyond an intuitive understanding towards a reasoned comprehension of a work requires knowledge about acoustics, the physiology of the voice, phonetics, and the psychology of vocal utterance. (p.158)

And Anhalt begins his work with penetrating analyses of three contemporary vocal works; Berio's *Sequenza III* (1966), Ligeti's *Nouvelles aventures* (1962-5), and Lutosławski's *Trzy poematy Henri Michaux* (1963). Of these, the Ligeti analysis is perhaps the most profound and illustrates Anhalt's approach well. Using criteria derived from research in psycholinguistics and other sciences of human communication, Anhalt is able to provide a penetrating note-by-note analysis of the human drama played out in this highly condensed work. In fact 'note-by-note' does an injustice to the method, as the pregnant silences are analysed in just as much detail as the sounds; later in the book Anhalt specifically

refers to psycholinguistic research, which has classified types of pause in human utterance in terms of their communication function, or psychological significance, which depends on the context in which they occur.

Undoubtedly this approach will not be welcomed unequivocally by all members of the music fraternity, particularly as it embraces aspects of music which are, in a certain very limited sense, 'not in the score'. I can remember, as a student composer, arguing strongly with others who, I felt, were using phonetic permutation techniques (derived from the work of Berio) as a musical procedure, while glossing over the psychological import of the dismemberment of the texts. At the time, however, my objections appeared 'subjective' and 'extra-musical', compared with the analytic concreteness of the scored procedures themselves. Anhalt's book addresses this problem in a profound and detailed manner, and in so doing offers new insights into the layers of timbral complexity and the concomitant psychological meaning involved in the use of the human voice.

One general feature of the book with which I had difficulty was, in fact, its academic thoroughness. In his desire to give a respectable grounding to an approach which is perhaps new to music analysts, Anhalt has referenced his text so well that it occasionally becomes heavy going. Similarly, in chapters such as 'Theme and Recent Background' and 'Orpheus Resurgent', the desire for a complete overview of the multiplicity of approaches to the voice adopted by modern composers occasionally tends towards list-making where, as a reader, I would have preferred a more systematic, if therefore opinionated, appraisal of notational or text-setting procedures and even ideological positions taken up by the composers discussed. Anhalt's presentation, however, makes his book an ideal reference text for further research.

At a more detailed level, I had some minor difficulties with the analytical terminology used to describe Lutosławski's *Trzy poematy*. Anhalt introduces a number of terms to describe the behaviour of layers of statistically distributed materials. However, from the descriptions in the text of 'interlock', 'sweep' and 'swarm', I would have concluded that Example 4.12 was a 'swarm' (Anhalt describes it as an 'interlock'). Similarly, if Example 4.13 is a 'sweep', why is Example 4.12 not a 'sweep'? In fact it was difficult to ascertain whether the term 'sweep' referred to a texture whose total pitch-band rose (or fell), or a texture whose constituents rose (or fell), or both. This kind of problem however merely emphasises the lack of an agreed technical vocabulary for the discussion of works the textures of which are based on 'mass-aggregates' in this way.

The discussion of Graeco-Egyptian magical incantational procedures and their relationship to phonetic text deconstructions in contemporary works was highly illuminating. I found myself, however, disagreeing with Anhalt's semi-equation of magical 'causality' and scientific causality—the one an idealist and the other a materialist conception—and wondered how the composers of such works, mostly growing out of the extreme 'rationalist' ethos of post-Webern modernism, would react to this equation. For me, Anhalt's parallelism amounts to a critique of the whole super-rationalist ethos of much avant-garde work in the sixties.

The tracing of the historical development of text-sound art, from the Dadaists and before to the Lettrist movement, adds an interesting new dimension to the perception of developments 'inside' the world of music. But, although he makes some reference to popular music ('stretching, straining—do not these words bring to mind the high-larynxed nasal voice of the typical male rock singer?'), Anhalt in general concentrates on the musical (and text-sound) avant-garde. This is a pity, for popular vocal music, being so very much focused on the idiosyncratic practices of individual vocalists, and the adoption of various stereotypical (often class- or gender-defining) vocal mannerisms, is a rich seam for Anhalt's style of analysis.

More generally, Anhalt's analytic referent for phonetic play—play with rates of delivery, intonation, etc.—tends to be the 'normal' speech-act. Fruitful and insightful though this approach is, there are other modalities of vocal use which we need not relate to the flow of speech utterance, such as vocal mimicry (of other creatures, natural events, machines) and voice sounds as pure timbral objects having their own internal logic and sufficiently distanced from speech-acts to be disconnected from that domain in our perception. Here an approach based upon detailed acoustic analysis is required. Anhalt's book does review the research in this area quite well, but as most of this research has been initiated and developed by language specialists, the resulting discussion tends to remain within the domain of the psychology and physiology of speech-acts. An independent acoustic understanding of timbral articulation (similar to the musician's systematically abstracted approach to pitch relations) would be a powerful complement to Anhalt's book.

Paul Robinson

Tom Johnson in Paris

Tom Johnson, *Réservé aux sopranes*; Claire Alby, Annie Bion, Sara Goldstein, Birgit Keulertz (sopranos), Henry de Rouville (countertenor), Maria João Serrão (soprano), Andrea Atlanti (flute), Aude Rocca-Serra (harp), Francoise Gernigon (violin), Laurent Cirade (cello), conducted by Johnson, American Center, Paris, 29 February - 10 March 1984

Tom Johnson, an American living in Paris (currently on a scholarship from the National Endowment for the Arts) is little known in Britain, and the première of his fourth opera, *Réservé aux sopranes*, caused barely a ripple of attention on this side of the Channel. Born in 1939 in Colorado, Johnson studied at Yale and later privately with Morton Feldman. It is to Feldman that he traces his formative musical experiences. From 1971 to 1983 he contributed lively columns on new music to *Village Voice* in New York, the last of which was a well-calculated broadside on the subject of cultural isolation from European developments, aimed at his fellow minimalist American composers:

> I see American minimalist composers going about their work without realizing that many European composers are now not only making use of these same formal procedures, but giving them strong content at the same time. I see all these people continuing to work with premises dating from the 60s and early 70s, and I sense that their work is gradually losing touch with the rest of the world. If the situation continues, American artists as a whole are destined to become gradually more provincial, and less relevant elsewhere.[1]

This goes some way towards explaining Johnson's apparently permanent move to Paris, and also the direction taken by his new opera, which has a French text and inhabits a musical sound world that is pervasively, though understatedly, French.

Johnson's first acknowledged work is *Secret Songs* (a group of sound poems), written when he was 19, abandoned, and then revised when sound poetry became an established genre in the 1960s. Even more 'secret' are the *Private Pieces: Piano Music for Self Entertainment* (1967), a set of written instructions for solo pianist, to be realised in private. Within this work, however, are contained the seeds of a generation of pieces that became gradually more public in their manifestations. The performer is provoked into 'composing' by verbal suggestions that concentrate the mind on the immediacy of the moment by dividing its attention between the tasks given to the left and right hands and the reading of the text.

> Although no more instructions are necessary at the moment, the text is continuing in order to give you time to achieve a sense of balance between the three things, so that they seem to accompany one another. You have three more sentences in which to achieve this balance before going on to a new section of the piece.[2]

Several aspects of these pieces exemplify concerns that continue to be central to Johnson's work. First, they extend on invitation to others to compose by involving them in the thought processes of composition by the backdoor of language; this technique is exploited even more effectively in the *Lectures with Audience Participation* (1972-5). Second, they draw an analogy between composing and playing games which is re-created in *Risks for Unrehearsed Performers* (begun 1977) and is related more distantly, to Johnson's interest in deductive number processes.

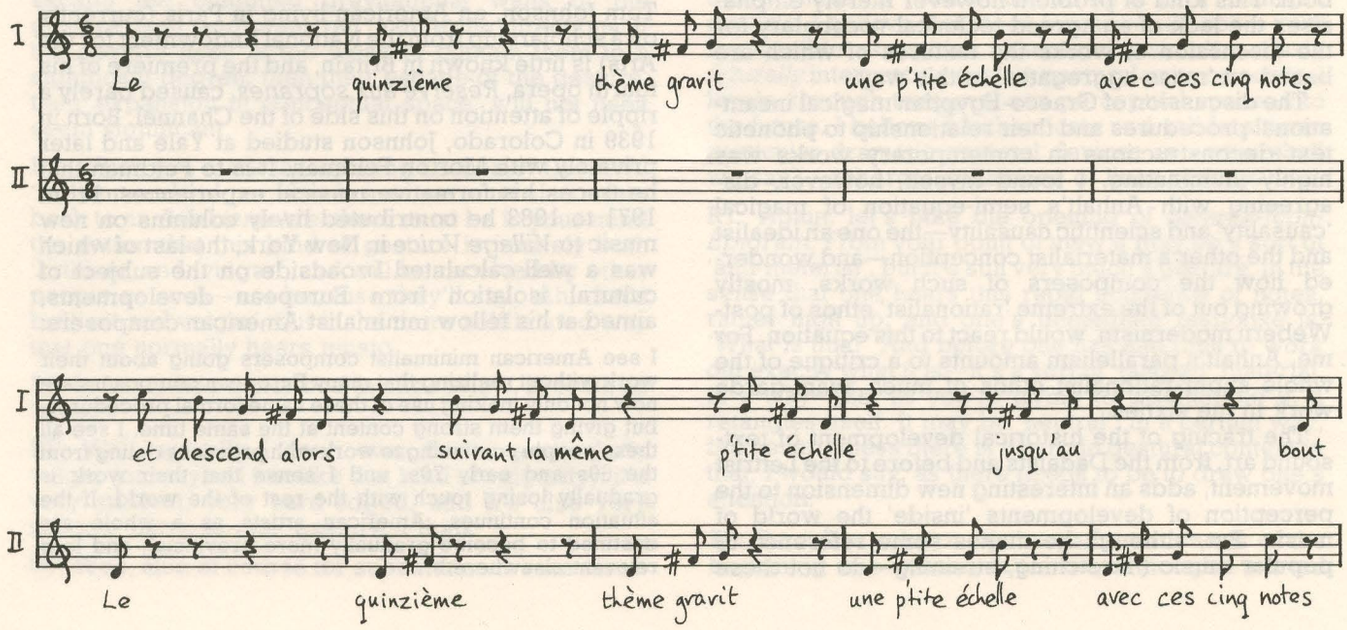
The last point is crucial to Johnson's development, for it was with the aid of number that he found an authentic musical voice, albeit on a very tight minimal rein; *The Four-note Opera* (1972), which is just that—an opera composed of only four notes—is a graphic example of the severity of the limitations that Johnson's minimalist theories place upon his work. Perhaps the later *Rational Melodies*, a volume of melodic exercises, might be seen in the light of the tendency of composers to publish analyses of their own works: a detailed appendix explaining the structure of each melody is included in the score. But that would be to interpret the publication as primarily an analytical work rather than one designed for performance, which is what Johnson intended. Nevertheless, the appendix is useful in mapping out the possibilities and limitations of number processes in relation to their intelligibility in performance. The introduction to the volume sheds some interesting light on his attitude to logical sequences:

> When I first began working with logical sequences, I was concerned with making this logic totally perceptible, even by untrained listeners, and even on first hearing. Sometimes I even reinforced the music with parallel visual activity so as to make everything doubly clear. This deliberate obviousness can also be seen in many of the Rational Melodies, particularly Nos. 5, 12, and 17. As I continued working in this way, however, total clarity came to seem less important, and somewhat limiting. I became open to more subtle types of deduction, writing pieces that might require two or three hearings to fully understand, and in some cases, such as Nos. 2, 16, and 20, pieces that one might have to study for some time in order to define the specific rules by which everything had been deduced. Depending on your attitude towards music and puzzles and logic, you may prefer the more obvious melodies to the more subtle ones, or the other way around, but for me there is no longer any particular virtue one way or the other. Sometimes things are simple, and sometimes they are not so simple, and they can be beautiful either way.
>
> You can never completely pin down what you are doing, even when you are working in a rigorously logical way, and this is one of the things about deductive processes that most appeals to me. Even sequences that seem completely self-evident when we see them, hear them or think them, are ultimately about as difficult to explain as chance or sonata form or artistic quality or God.[3]

Again, these pieces are not exactly for public consumption: they are about composing; performance and even music are not prime concerns.

Number permeates Johnson's work, as the following list of titles indicates: *Sixty Note Fanfares* (1976), *Nine Bells* (1978-9), *Trinity: Three Anthems on Three Notes for Four Antiphonal Choirs* (1978). The reaction of readers to the discussion of number permutations may very well be 'So what?'. It certainly recalls the endless and tedious debates about serial

Example 1 *Réservé aux sopranes*, 'Le grand canon', opening of the *quinzième thème*



permutation in the 1950s and 1960s. But Johnson's saving grace is his quietly confident and humorous way of handling potentially arcane material, and the fact that, unlike the serial theorists, he has no intention of developing a specifically musical language. It seems eminently possible that Johnson will switch his mode of expression away from music back to words or to spoken drama or to virtually any medium susceptible of manipulation by means of number.

It could be said that it is through theatre, rather than abstract music, that Johnson has found a public voice; I should perhaps say 'opera', since has chosen that generic term to designate *The Four-note Opera* and *Réservé aux sopranes*. *Réservé aux sopranes* is a direct descendant of *The Four-note Opera* (the two operas in between are *The Masque of Clouds* and *Five Shaggy Dog Operas*). Just as in *The Four-note Opera* Johnson exploits what might be called 'musical tautologies', the continual presentation in music and words of the structure of the opera. The opera is about itself and nothing else: the six singers are purely musical 'characters', named after solmization syllables (Do, Ré, Ré, Mi, Sol, La); the work has no plot.

Johnson wrote his libretto in French. His original reason for doing so was the purely practical one of comprehension by his intended audience, but as he worked on the text, refining it and making the language more colloquial, he found that he was achieving a simplicity and a neat irony that would have been difficult to attain using English. The work is in three parts. 'La procession' (40 minutes) has 24 scenes (numbered 19 to 42), each no more than a couple of lines long in the libretto and made up of instructions and text. The work begins:

(. . .)
Soudain, il y a parole.
Scène 19: *Le premier soprane donne une petite explication et rechante le thème avec des mots*:
Maintenant, les mots et la musique vont ensemble.
Scène 20: *Le deuxième soprane chante le thème avec des mots*:
Maintenant, les mots et la musique ne vont pas très bien ensemble.
Scène 21: *Le troisième soprane chante le thème avec des mots*:
Maintenant, tout va bien sauf à la fin.

'Le divertissement' (25 minutes) consists of permutations on the names of the 'characters'. 'Le grand canon' (50 minutes) is a series of 21 *thèmes* with a finale. The text of each *thème* comments on the music, and together they comment on the nature of opera. Even the lay-out and orthography of the libretto are part of the game:

LETROISIÈMETHÈME.CEN'ESTQUEDURÉCITATIF.ILNEVEUTRIENDIRE.

Le qua trième n'est qu'un p'tit exer cice tout en oc ta ves.

notes
cinq et
ces descend
avec alors
échelle suivant
p'tite la
une même
gravit p'tite
thème échelle
quinzième jusqu'au
Le bout

(Example 1)

A simple example of Johnson's theatrical wit is the 19th theme:

Le dix-neuvième thème travaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaille le souffle.

The music consists of a repeated phrase, which, with each repeat, rests longer on the word 'travaille'. The sopranos are finally driven to the end of their capacity to hold their 'souffle' and the structure collapses.

I suggested to Johnson that much of the humour of *Réservé aux sopranes* consists in the parody of opera, but that by the very choice of so well-established a whipping-post he had robbed the work of some of its effect. His response was that opera itself was not the target, but that illusion in operatic narrative was. The term 'opera' is applicable to the work only insofar as the six singers at times sing in an operatic manner, and Johnson points out that, in a similar way, to describe the works of Robert Wilson as 'operas' is to take far too much of a liberty with the generally accepted meaning of the word.

Réservé aux sopranes luxuriates in the sound of the voice in a way that easily transcends any of the potentially tedious aspects of minimal music. Haunting melodies, sharply focused rhythms (a waltz at one point), and sensuous vocal textures are immediately attractive. But the impression that these characteristics give of Johnson's handling his material more freely is an illusion: the work is rigorously and logically structured—indeed, according to Johnson, *The Four-note Opera* is 'chaos by comparison'.

The French text, inventive use of simple modal materials, and the instrumentation (flute, harp, violin, and cello) of *Réservé aux sopranes* prompt comparisons with Satie's *Socrate* and even Stravinsky's *Perséphone*. These resemblances were emphasised by Henry Pillsbury's direction of the first performance. The singers (it was a delightful irony that despite the title of the work one of the vocal parts was taken by a countertenor) were clad for 'Le divertissement' in Greek-looking robes and moved between what might have been intended to be the pillars of a Greek temple. But at other points, the direction seemed out of sympathy with Johnson's conception; especially in the introduction of dramatic interpretations, which though amusing in themselves led the opera astray into the realms of light entertainment. Any notion of characterisation seems erroneous in this work since Johnson sees the singers not as characters, but as human representations of musical phenomena; this was most effectively realised in 'Le divertissement', where the singers, who stand for crotchets and quavers, moved from one pillar to another, adopting the pitch associated with each pillar as they reached it.

It is interesting to contemplate how long the Cageian aesthetics of non-intention and non-manipulation will continue to sustain American composers. As Johnson's music becomes itself more interesting the aesthetic that guides it seems less and less important. Will minimalism continue to provide him with a basic technique from which, as in the past, he can create his music, or might it ultimately impose such limitations on his development that the only escape will be renunciation?

[1] 'European envoi', *Village Voice* (11 January 1983).
[2] *Private Pieces: Piano Music for Self Entertainment* (New York: Two-Eighteen Press, 1967), p.7.
[3] *Rational Melodies* (New York: Two-Eighteen Press, 1982), p.3.

Andrea Olmstead

ASUC 1984

American Society of University Composers 19th Annual Festival Conference, Ohio State University, 4-8 April 1984

If Ohio State University wanted to attract attention to the 19th annual ASUC Conference[1] by inviting iconoclast Frank Zappa as keynote speaker, they succeeded. At 44 Zappa is still an 'angry young man'. He spoke abrasively about the relation of contemporary music to 'industrial' American society—his point being that there is none. Insults are his style: he dislikes universities, teachers, and tenure, and he criticises new music as 'irrelevant' and 'genuinely obnoxious' to society. 'There is', he said, 'no way a composer will ever convince a real live person there is a need for his services.' Zappa may think he's expressing new ideas but of course Schoenberg's reply when he was asked why he became a composer was, 'Because nobody else wanted the job.' Both serious and pop composers today, Zappa says, should be aware of how great a role financial considerations play in the decisions of record companies. This fact should also be readily apparent to anyone over 13, Zappa's age for 'Debbie', a fictitious, archetypal, sheltered American teenager who is the 'pop music consumer and ultimate arbiter of musical taste for the entire nation'.

What is Zappa's answer to his gloom and doom about the profession of music making? The machine. Zappa's frustration with performers has deterred him from live performance, even his own—he claimed that he had not played the guitar in over a year—and led him towards the Synclavier II. Used more by Hollywood and pop composers than by university composers, this $100,000 gadget contains a synthesizer, computer, and printer. In private conversation Zappa revealed himself as even more radical than his address indicated: to achieve his musical ends he wants to eliminate musicians' unions, and ultimately live performers. Zappa, who owns his own record company (he has sold over 30 million albums), has no real solution to the problem posed to him that many composers cannot afford 'the machine'. Despite his distrust of live performers, live musicians performed American premières of his *Naval Aviation in Art?* (Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus) and *The Perfect Stranger* (the Columbus Symphony Orchestra) at concerts during the conference.

A certain amount of dissimulation was evident on both ASUC's and Zappa's parts. First, the reasons why Ohio State invited Zappa—to the consternation of some members of the ASUC board—should be plain. In his address Zappa said, 'I do not belong to your organisation, I know nothing about it, and I'm not even interested in it.' Did the conference planners really think Zappa belonged in the university composers' category, along with—to choose participant composers at random—Allen Bonde, Norman Dinerstein, Brian Fennelly, Paul Lansky, Alex Lubet, Edwin London, and Pauline Oliveros—or were they looking at the possibility of attracting the press and overflow crowds? Second, and more interesting, why did Zappa accept this invitation? This season saw his first foray into the 'serious' music world when he was a guest composer at IRCAM. As IRCAM represents the establishment of European composition, ASUC similarly represents the establishment of American composition, and the pieces performed at the conference were American premières of works originally given in Paris. The ASUC conference lent Zappa a respectability among people he maintains he dislikes; what is curious is that he wants such acceptance.

With the initial Zappa flurry over, the 285 registered participants settled down to the business of a four-day conference: 40 scheduled papers and panels, and 65 works (picked from around 1000 submitted) in back-to-back concerts. Although the planners had reduced the number of pieces compared with earlier conferences and increased the number of papers, attempting to hear and assimilate all the music was an exercise in overcoming overdose.

Owing to the amount of music presented, I was unable to attend all the paper sessions, which ran simultaneously with concerts. The subjects of the sessions were 'American Music', 'Minimalism', 'Computer Music', 'Professional Services for Composers', 'Graduate Programs in Composition', 'Non-tonal Pitch Organization', 'Music Perception', and 'Time and Music'. Partly because of Ohio State's computer music facilities (they have a PDP 11/45) and its courses in music perception, the conference geared itself somewhat in these directions. Particularly memorable among the music perception and the composer papers was 'Performance Space, Ritual, and Illusion' by Elliott Schwartz, who interjected the composer's view into the two hours allotted to psychoacousticians. (The representative from IRCAM persuasively rediscovered the wheel by proving scientifically that timbre affects the perception of counterpoint—which French composers in the 17th century knew when they wrote in *style brisé*.)

'Graduate Programs in Composition: Pedagogical Responsibilities' was as deadly as its title, but 'Professional Services for Composers', chaired by Joel Chadabe, sensibly stressed the practical ends of composition. Margaret Jory of ASCAP and Barbara Petersen of BMI (American equivalents to the British Performing Rights Society) spoke about the merits of performing rights organisations. Nancy Clarke of the American Music Center informed the audience of the many benefits of the AMC and its library, which serves as a central clearing-house for American composers. John Duffy, founder of Meet the Composer, explained the history, purpose, and future plans of the Exxon orchestral residency program, in which composers are placed with major orchestras, serve as advisers on new music, are commissioned by the orchestras to write new works, and develop new music programs in the community. At the final concert Duffy was created a life member of ASUC in recognition of his numerous efforts on behalf of composers.

The general impression I gained from the music offered at the conference was that ordered atonality —non-repetitive chromaticism based on expanded motifs, or twelve-note music, or some kind of free serial technique—was accepted as a given. It demonstrates that a conservative Schoenbergian influence remains at the heart of today's university teaching: Schoenberg has become respectable and bourgeois. Composers seem to be suffering from a fear of using the modern orchestra, probably because of lack of access to it. Most symptomatic of this alienation was a certain rhythmic timidity, which was less evident in the chamber works and at times altogether absent from the computer music, some of which was rhythmically very impressive. Another exception was Edwin London's choral technique in *Psalm of these Days V*.

On the whole there was little in the way of genuine

experimentation, but the best examples of 'interesting' music were electronic works, which included computer-generated sound with visuals, modified instrumental sounds, and new instruments created specifically for use with electronic filters. Orchestral music came next in order of interest (of which the best example was William Kraft's *Triple Play*), but a conservative handling of rhythm detracted from its effectiveness. Much of the chamber music took for granted a high degree of virtuosity, but used it for little more than local coloristic effects. The severest criticism I have of the entire event, from a compositional point of view, is that the composers seemed unable to sustain their works from beginning to end, because of either lack of inspiration, or lack of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic integration—that is, lack of technique. This may show that the university has become a place to learn theory and not practice.

The first concert I attended began with Urban 15, an ensemble of six percussionist-dancers from San Antonio, Texas, who performed three works by J. George Cisneros, one of their members. The music was ritualistic, representing a kind of parochial primitivism, and was numblingly loud. Pauline Oliveros combined live electronics with performance on the accordion in two atmospheric repetitive works, *Rattlesnake Mountain* and *The Seventh Mansion*. Of *Rattlesnake Mountain* the composer wrote: 'The piece records [my] responses while watching the shape of the mountain and the effects of breezes blowing through the meadows and forest below.' The music achieved the desired effect. This concert ended with an amusing and clever two-part piece by Michael Schell, called *An Alarming Situation*, which dealt with clocks in all sorts of ways.

Friday night's concert was distinguished by Edwin London's choral and orchestral *Psalm of these Days V*, based on Psalm 47, which London conducted. This lyric and diatonic work was very well crafted for the chorus and maintained an air of comforting religiosity.

Of the two concerts of electronic music, one consisted primarily of videos accompanying electronic music. Of these Reynold Weidenaar's *Night Flame Ritual* for electronic tape, clarinet (the soloist was F. Gerard Errante), and video was outstandingly enjoyable; it managed successfully to combine the serious subject of fire-fighting with a colourful whimsy. The audience knew we were in trouble when the soloist performing James Wagoner's *On the Beach at Fontana* (text by James Joyce) for soprano and tape said she had never met the composer and asked him to identify himself before she sang. It seems from his inept prosody that he could benefit from becoming better acquainted with singers.

The final concert of the conference was performed by the Columbus Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Christian Badea. Mark Phillips's three-movement *Intrusis* betrayed a familiarity with Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. *Liturgy* by Nancy Laird Chance achieved a solemn, coloristic effect. The highlight of the evening was *Triple Play* by William Kraft, composer-in-residence for the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra; it incorporated solo cello and antiphonal percussion from the balconies. We also heard *Ensemblance* by Peter Child, scored for a conducted chamber group and tape, and Steven Stucky's *Transparent Things*, a quiet and restrained contemplation of D major.

Fittingly, perhaps, the conference ended with a performance of Zappa's *The Perfect Stranger* for large ensemble. Conventionally scored for orchestral instruments, the work begins with ascending string glissandos and ends with woodwind and brass playing descending, drunken-sounding glissandos. In the middle, each family of instruments is given a turn. Despite his railing at performers' shortcomings, Zappa's music is not especially difficult, being in rhythmic unison much of the time. One is forced to the conclusion that, since many other composers of music much more difficult than his have coped ably with live performers, so can Zappa. Present in the audience, he did not have the grace to acknowledge the conductor and orchestra.

[1] ASUC's purpose is the promotion of interest in new music. It publishes the *ASUC Journal of Music Scores*, in which facsimiles of works by its member composers are printed, issues recordings, promotes broadcasts, and sponsors an annual composition competition. Its *News Bulletin* carries notices of its activities, and selected papers from its annual conference are published in a series of monographs. ASUC membership, which is open to all composers and other musicians interested in contemporary music, is dealt with by the American Music Center, 250 West 54th Street, Room 300, New York, NY 10019. The *Journal of Music Scores* and the recordings are available from European American Retail Music, Inc., PO Box 850, Valley Forge, PA 19482.

Keith Potter

Martinez' 'Sister Aimee'

Odaline de la Martinez, *Sister Aimee*, Tulane University of New Orleans, 12 April 1984

Odaline de la Martinez describes herself as a 'Cuban-American', for she was born and initially brought up in Cuba but emigrated to New Orleans with her parents when she was still a child. After studying mathematics as well as music at Newcomb College (now part of the city's Tulane University), she went to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music; she has lived there for the last dozen years.

Martinez is known these days principally as a conductor. She has for some time now conducted as well as directed the artistic policy and frequently the administration of the contemporary music ensemble Lontano, founded with fellow students when she was still at the RAM. More recently she has formed a chamber orchestra called the Contemporary Chamber Orchestra which performs in the London borough of Islington and elsewhere and is 'resident orchestra' at the Almeida Theatre in the borough.

Martinez is also a pianist (she used to play regularly with Lontano before she took over the conducting) and has undertaken postgraduate work in computer music at Surrey University. Few of those who attend Lontano's concerts or those of the CCO are more than vaguely aware of her as a composer, however, for she has used her performing activities to promote her own music only on the rarest of occasions.

I can recall hearing at least three compositions by Martinez—who is widely known on the London music scene as 'Chachi'—before I had the opportunity of visiting New Orleans to see her opera last spring. Her music seems, from what I know of it, to be simple and direct, often with a strong melodic profile; her concern for direct expression in a context that easily incorporates a more 'avant-garde' attitude, to timbre in particular, has made me think, on at least one occasion—that of hearing some fairly recent songs at the Wigmore Hall—of George Crumb.

I was, however, as unprepared as I think some others were for the essentially very conventional and tonal language of the opera she has written in collaboration with John Whiting, another American resident in Britain, who is well known for other musical activities (though he has also acted on one occasion as librettist for Nigel Osborne). The work's main generating force is a gospel hymn tune of Martinez' own composition: a fairly splendid inspiration, though one that bears a disconcerting resemblance to the 'big tune' in Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. The musical style of *Sister Aimee* is, as its composer herself calls it, 'eclectic' in other ways too: there are one or two 'aleatoric' moments, for instance. A lot of the time, however, the vocal line consists of tonally-based arioso, sometimes even of simply spoken declamation, and the musical accompaniment sticks closely to its sources in the hymn and in jazz and folk idioms too. The music gains, I think, a good deal from the particular sonority of its orchestra: Martinez does away with violins and woodwind and uses a brass quintet, electric organ, and lower strings.

The reason for all this is, not unnaturally, the plot of the opera, which concerns the controversial and indeed outrageous revivalist preacher of the title. Aimee Semple McPherson fought her struggle between the conviction that she was among God's chosen ones and her apparently rather highly developed carnal lust in the years between the two World Wars; there were even faded photographs of her in the foyer of Tulane's Dixon Hall to prove the outward and visible signs of the former and at least to suggest the latter. Perhaps not surprisingly, Martinez and Whiting chose to concentrate on the spiritual torment, and much of the action took place off-stage; sometimes the on-stage action took the form of a static tableau against which the story was unfolded in words and music only.

While rendering this fairly short, two-act opera more practicable for the conditions under which it had to be mounted—a small stage, limited production facilities, a student chorus but local professional soloists and orchestra—this also focused more attention on character development and on the maintenance of musico-dramatic tension when stripped of all more obvious appeal except the overtly melodramatic than Martinez' first stage venture could really stand. Frank Monachino's occasionally quite bizarrely mismanaged production didn't help matters much; though the cast, which included Sandra Feduccia in the title role and Rita Lovett in the important part of her mother, the orchestra, and (some lapses apart) the chorus, conducted by Michael Howard, coped enthusiastically with this unusual but entirely laudable way of celebrating a university's 150th anniversary.

Elliott Schwartz

Henry Brant at the Holland Festival

American music, especially of that of an experimental nature, is no stranger to the Holland Festival. For a great many years the Dutch have been fascinated by musical developments in the USA, particularly those aspects that reveal an anti-establishment 'maverick' streak. (Holland is, of course, famous for its openness to new ideas and tolerance of diversity, whether political, religious, or artistic; it may be worth noting here that the Charles Ives Society of Europe was founded in the Netherlands many years before Ives became a musical icon.) The 1984 Holland Festival continued this remarkable tradition by devoting an entire week in June (9–16) to the work of an American composer just as iconoclastic in our time as Ives was half a century ago: Henry Brant.

Brant, who is now 70 years old, has long been a pioneer in the creative use of performance space, placing different players in a variety of unusual locations and creating complex (occasionally unsynchronised) overlapping textures to dramatise their physical separateness. He is also known for a highly personal, even dazzling, approach to instrumental sonority, often exploiting extremes of register

and novel doublings to produce a peculiarly high-voltage intensity. All of the works heard during the Holland Festival's week-long Brant retrospective demonstrated his very special ear for timbres. His fascination with distinctive sonority is just as apparent in the early *Galaxy II* (1954) for a chamber group of wind and percussion as in his saxophone quartet *From Bach's Menagerie* of 1975, or the recent works for a novel quartet of specially built, graduated string instruments. And, as might be expected, the lay-out of the performers within the space was an important element in a great many of the pieces. They included such antiphonal 'classics' as *Millennium III* (1957) for brass and percussion, and *Barricades* (1961) for solo oboe and mixed ensemble.

The most ambitious piece (or event) of the Brant week—both timbrally and spatially—was saved for the final day, and drew upon the resources of the entire city of Amsterdam. The work is called *Bran(d)t aan de Amstel* (which, with the added 'd' in the first word, translates as 'Fire on the Amstel') and requires more than 100 musicians to play while seated in canal boats, travelling through the city down the River Amstel. Four boatloads of performers (25 flautists and one percussionist per boat) followed one another along a predetermined route, traversing many canals and passing by a number of landmark churches and bridges along the way; at each of these intermediate points, other musical levels (land-based) were added to the texture.

A piece of this nature, lasting some four hours, is obviously not designed to be heard in its entirety by a single stationary audience. Some listeners were literally caught by a fragment of it unawares, perhaps while standing at a busy city intersection. Others, who knew of the event beforehand, stationed themselves with like-minded neighbours along the route—creating a rather festive, party-like ambience in the process—while waiting for the boats to pass. Still others decided to follow the route, rushing from one checkpoint to another by city tram, by taxi, or on foot. I was one of this last group, as I decided to observe the work 'in progress' by catching it at three different locations.

At the historic Munt (Mint Tower), about half an hour into the piece, one could hear the great carillon ringing; a brass band was situated at a bridge directly on the route, ready to swing into action at the arrival of the boats. The water-borne flute music, as it passed underneath the bridge, was quite spritely, scherzo-like, and almost electric in quality; it was also an effective counterfoil to the equally quirky brass (not to mention the tram bells and car horns).

More than an hour later, I picked up the action outside the Oude Kerke (Old Church). Here Brant had stationed two antiphonal choirs, each with its own instrumental accompaniment, and had given them quasi-liturgical, medieval-sounding passages to perform. As the boats passed by, one became aware of the church bells ringing. The flute and percussion music now consisted of sustained, slow-moving lines, projecting a solemn, stately character. The mood and pace had obviously changed—so greatly, in fact, that this section brought to mind the concept of a 'slow movement'—perhaps mirroring similar changes in the neighbourhood and the audience of local by-standers. On the other hand, I recognised quite a few of the listeners as the same people who had been at the Mint Tower earlier. Moreover, the few boats containing musicians were now surrounded by a virtual flotilla of other boats: a travelling audience of local Amsterdammers in their own pleasure craft, following Brant and his ensemble in true Pied-Piper fashion.

Still later in the afternoon, the 'Grand Finale' took place at the pier in front of the Carré Theatre. The composer must have realised that a great sense of expectation would be mounting by this time, since many people would be gathering at the theatre's outdoor plaza to await the boats' arrival. Accordingly he created a complex antiphonal texture to channel and control that mounting tension. For an hour or so before the final appearance of the flute convoy, a gradual crescendo was created by a host of balancing and overlapping component levels: a youth jazz band, two choruses, two civic brass bands (the Amsterdam Municipal Police Band and the Post Office Band), and four of the colourfully decorated street organs that are such a hallmark of this city, all spread out over a large outdoor space separated by canals. The ever-increasing counterpoint of crowd noises and car horns worked very naturally into the total mix. In fact the overall effect on my ears (especially when I began walking about within the space) was absolutely unique. On the level of sheer theatre, it was remarkable to observe this mass carnival atmosphere unfold—seemingly spontaneous, but actually shaped and manipulated by a single creative artist. Musically, Brant's awareness of long-range dramatic timing, and his ingenious sense of orchestration and spatial lay-out, kept all the levels clear (in anyone else's hands this might have deteriorated into sonic mush), and allowed the total effect to 'grow'.

Bran(d)t aan de Amstel, which had begun at 3 p.m., ended in front of the Carré Theatre shortly after 7 o'clock. Appropriately enough, the composer and many of his audience went directly into the Carré for an evening concert, the last major event of the Brant week in Amsterdam. Under the circumstances, a formal indoor programme could have been something of an anticlimax. Fortunately this concert included a number of very strong pieces to hold the attention, and sharp, taut ensemble performances, especially from the Hague Percussion Group under the direction of Reinbert de Leeuw.

Two Brant pieces on the programme were noteworthy: his landmark *Angels and Devils* (1932) for flute solo and flute ensemble, and a vigorous performance of his antiphonal *Origins* (1950) for percussion orchestra and solo trumpet. But the evening's most commanding pieces were American percussion works of the 1920s and 1930s composed by some of Brant's colleagues and mentors. Cowell's *Ostinato pianissimo* (1934) and Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* (1923-5) (complete with aeroplane propellors) were a delight to see and hear, especially for many who had experienced these legendary pieces only through recordings. The most surprising success of all, however, was *The Abongo* (1933) by John J. Becker. This work for large percussion ensemble, based on African folk ritual, is not only absolutely stunning in its own right, but also fascinating as a precursor of recent 'modernisms'—the use of non-Western models, quasi-minimalist repetitive processes, and the expansion of instrumental technique into the domain of theater and speech—some 30 years before the start of current vogue. These pieces were perfect vehicles for exploring the range of that American eclectic experimental tradition, of which Brant is the most vigorous living example.

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Virginia Anderson

Almeida 1984

Almeida Festival, London, 14 June–8 July 1984

The Almeida is a strange festival, more a festival of festivals. This one, the fourth, included series of French and Russian music and film, a weekend event presented by the Electro-Acoustic Music Association of Great Britain (EMAS), experimental and avant-garde English music and film, and even a musical and a concert of 19th-century spirituals (given, appropriately enough, on 4 July). I can speak only of those events that I attended, which were by no means all as I arrived in London only on the 23rd, in time for some of the Satie Weekend, and was later involved in rehearsals for the final concert, Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*.

Vexations (1892-3) dominated the Satie Weekend of 23-24 June, if only through its length. The 840 repetitions of the work were performed at crotchet = 60, which resulted in a 24-hour version.[1] 21 pianists, with few exceptions all major figures in English experimental and avant-garde music, each took at least an hour's shift; they included John Tilbury, Elliott Schwartz, Richard Bernas, Tim Souster, Phillip Mead, Michael Nyman, Susan Bradshaw, Stephen Montague, Christopher Hobbs, Andrew Charity, John White, Howard Skempton, Dave Smith, and Keith Potter. The performers seemed to be divided between those who made the repetitions as alike as possible and those who chose to vary their interpretation for the sake of interest. All the experimentalists were of the former persuasion and even took the purist approach so far as to avoid the use of the pedals. Among those looking for a personal style, some opted for a variety of pedallings, some for alternating dynamics. It would have been interesting to hear a performance uncluttered (as far as possible) by personality, but perhaps this is irrelevant. John White interprets Satie's instruction, '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', not as an injunction to play the work 840 times but as an instruction to be followed if one were to attempt such a thing.[2] However, while it is possible to give a performance of *Vexations* that consists of a single rendering of the 'motif', there is no escaping the fact that the work has come to be regarded as consisting of 840 evenly and expressionlessly played repetitions. Measured against this standard, the Almeida performance failed.

The topics dealt with in the Satie symposium that followed, given by Wilfrid Mellers, Patrick Gowers, Antony Melville, and Gavin Bryars, were changing attitudes to Satie's music, an appraisal of *Socrate* (1918) in the light of contemporary reactions, translations of Satie's writings, and the Rose+Croix music. To have scheduled the symposium after such a long and draining work as *Vexations* was the only thoughtless decision taken by the organisers of the festival; even Dr Mellers's dancing during a musical example did little to rouse the audience. Possibly in consideration of flagging stamina, the promised open discussion did not take place, despite the fact that methodological differences seemed to indicate a possible divergence of thought between the participants.

On the evening of the 24th *Socrate* (1918) was performed by Music Projects/London, conducted by Richard Bernas. Sopranos Linda Strachan, Jenny Albon, and Rosamund Sykes among them took the roles of the four characters. Satie called *Socrate* a 'drame symphonique avec voix'; it is an attempt to capture the qualities of an ancient music and the soloists are instructed to sing as if reading. This understated style (reinforced at the festival by the stark performance space of the Almeida Theatre, with its three brick arches framing the soloists) results in an almost completely flat landscape of feeling—so restrained, in fact, that the power of the last scene (Socrates' death) is almost surprising. The work lacks the immediately endearing characteristics of much of Satie's music, the noises of *Parade*, the wit and charm of many of the piano pieces, but is nonetheless impressive.

The second half of the concert consisted of some of Satie's shorter works. John White, who considers Satie a major influence upon his own music, accompanied Michael Chambon in several cabaret songs and the violinist Alexander Balanescu in *Choses vues à droite et à gauche (sans lunettes)* (1914), then performed the solo piano works *Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel* (1894; used by White in his own Sonata no.53, 1972), *Le piège de Méduse* (1913), and the early *Ogives* (1886). It was refreshing to see the piano pieces performed in a deadpan manner, without the emphasis on the humorous elements that other pianists seem to feel the need to introduce; White certainly understands his spiritual mentor and should record these works.

The retrospective concert of Tim Souster's music on the 26th highlighted Souster's concern about political and social events.[3] His subjects are worthy of treatment, but a serious subject does not guarantee musical quality. *Spectral* (1972) was written at a time when almost everyone in popular and art music seemed to be using whale-song as source material. Souster adopted a different approach by transcribing the whale-song into coloured graphic notation to be realised by viola, leaving the tape part to provide watery echoes. However, as the American composer Barney Childs said in a concert review, no one would have written these pieces 'if, in common belief, malevolent whales were wantonly slaughtering millions of innocent plankton'.[4] *The Music Room* (1976) is a theatre piece about the British army's use of white noise in the interrogation of prisoners suspected of being members of the IRA. In this performance the doctor/interrogator Stephen Montague forced a hooded James Fulkerson to stand to attention and play the trombone while a tape provided white noise; this seemed to me a silly evocation of a serious problem.

The only one of these works in which the musical interest matched the gravity of the issues that inspired it was *Zorna* (1974), Souster's response to the problem of heroin traffic. It uses a subtle pageantry of three drummers in white, who march from the rear of the hall to the front, where a soprano saxophonist plays in conjunction with a tape-delay system, imitating the sound of the Turkish oboe or *zurna*. All elements are uncoordinated until a given point, which results in an unrelenting, high-energy music. Also enjoyable was a work with resonances in Souster's own past, *Heavy Reductions* (1977) for tuba and taped tubas, based on the opening of *Das Rheingold*. Its title and use of source material are reminiscent of 1970s 'readymades' and the systems used by the PTO (Promenade Theatre Orchestra).

The Contemporary Chamber Orchestra's concert, given on 27 June, consisted mostly of works by the English mainstream avant garde. In Harrison Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadiae mechanicae*

perpetuum (1978) the compositional mechanisms circumvented any possibility of exploiting the characteristic sounds of the low instruments scored for.[5] Nigel Osborne's Concerto for flute and chamber orchestra (1980) offered a little more, but Sebastian Forbes's *Sonata for 21* (1975-6) was full of academic clichés such as long notes ending in a flurry of strings. Newcomer Steve Martland's *Lotta continua* is influenced by Glass, but unlike most minimal or systems works it runs into some rather surprising and delightful corners, including a lovely jazz-like section. Interestingly, Martland describes this work as one for student orchestra; from this I must conclude that student orchestras in England (at least in Liverpool University, where Martland was a student) are incredibly competent, as this work is not easy to coordinate and the high brass parts are not easy in any respect.

On Saturday evening 30 June at the Bloomsbury Theatre works by Marius Constant and Iannis Xenakis were performed by Constant's ensemble Ars Nova, with the soloists Silvio Gualda, Elisabeth Chojnacka, and Patrice Fontanarosa. Constant's *103 regards dans l'eau* (1982-4, being given its British première on this occasion) groups small sections into four 'movements'; its echoes of the traditional violin concerto—ordering of contrasts, tempos, cadenzas, etc.—were brought out by Fontanarosa and the chamber orchestra. In *14 stations* (1969-70) the soloist is instructed to move through 14 installations of percussion instruments, some conventional, others built specially for the piece; he is accompanied by a 'chorus' of six instruments 'commenting on the action'.[6] With Gualda performing, there was plenty of action too: he ran among the installations as if they were an obstacle course. Unfortunately there was little else—Constant seems enamoured of the sounds to the detriment of the piece.

By contrast, Xenakis's use of percussion is never gratuitous, particularly in *Komboi* (1981) for percussion and harpsichord, the end of which Gualda played on a set of giant flower pots. All of the Xenakis works performed here were much more accessible than those of Constant, notably *Naama (Flux)* (1984, also a British première) for harpsichord, in which short sections are transformed in repetition.

The following day I caught the second half of the EMAS festival. As the title suggests, Ricardo Mandolini's *Canción de madera y agua* (Song of wood and water) imitates electronically the sounds associated with those materials, but the resulting clichés are better suited to a commercial for bottled water or a coffee percolator than to a concert work. Charles Dodge's *Any Resemblance is Purely Coincidental* (1980) presented a computer-processed recording of Caruso singing *the* aria from *Pagliacci* with a very live Stephen Montague, resplendent in tails, as the accompanist. This sort of dismembering of familiar music also occurs in Jon Appleton's *Boom Sha Boom*, a work reminiscent of James Tenney's pioneering *Blue Suede* (1961), a tape collage of fragments of Elvis Presley's *Blue Suede Shoes*.

Marc Battier's *Ritratto a memoria* (1983, subtitled 'Various manners of looking at the same picture') was a too-precious evocation of childhood. *Recaus* by Gabriel Fitzsimmons sounded like a video game, perhaps because the composer is only 21 and perhaps because the pre-sets of a Fairlight computer guarantee its user something approaching 'Space Invaders' noises. Christopher Fox's *Winds of Heaven* was notable for its almost non-existent tape part and for Peter Hannan's new techniques for recorder. Barry Schrader's *Moon Whales and other Moon Poems* (1982-3), performed by Mary Wiegold, represented southern Californian music; it was written in a tonal, quasi-popular style and formed a pleasant contrast to other events of the day, which included the presentation of a delightful play-it-yourself installation by Hugh Davies. Much hoopla surrounded the closing performance, the London première of Xenakis's *Bohor* (1962). As it turned out, all the drama concerned the multitrack tape machine and whether it would be fixed in time for the concert. The music, as promised, was very loud, with over 20 speakers in the room, but it was not worth risking one's hearing for.

The only part of the Russian festival I attended was the concert of Soviet music given by Capricorn on Tuesday 3 July. The interest of the programme lay not in the works of Edison Denisov, who writes in a kind of cosmopolitan avant-garde style and who, in any event, is fairly well known in the West, but in Sofiya Gubaydulina's *Garden of Joy and Sorrow* (19), which had a haunting flute ritornello and used mildly extended harp techniques, and Gabriel Popov's Septet (1926-7), a delightfully mismanaged mixture of Hindemith and Milhaud.

Gavin Bryars's concert on 6 July consisted of three older works, *My First Homage* (1978), *Out of Zaleski's Gazebo* (1977), and *Hi Tremolo* (1980) with *The Vespertine Park* (1980), played by Bryars and others, including former members of Garden Furniture—John White and Dave Smith.[7] The second half was the British première of *Three Studies on 'Medea'*, reworkings of excerpts from Bryars's new opera. Bryars has had little luck with *Medea*, his first collaboration with Robert Wilson: productions were promised in Venice, Rome, Milan, and New York, before the première was finally given in Lyons in October. It was hard to gain an impression of the entire opera from this sample, but the work is certainly more 'operatic' than Bryars's opera for record, *Irma*. One wonders why it was felt that four singers with a small orchestra needed amplification when three had got along fine without any in *Socrate* only two weeks earlier. The amplification provided was tinny, made one dread every entrance by the singers, and ruined what was otherwise a splendid performance.

The festival closed with the first performance of Cardew's *The Great Learning* (1968-70) in its entirety.[8] The work is a monument of experimental music, involving over 100 people, and the performance was a labour of love by those who worked with Cardew, notably director John Tilbury, and Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton, Dave Smith, Eddie Prévost, and Keith Rowe.

Of the seven paragraphs of the work, 2 and 7 sound remarkably up-to-date; while Cardew dedicated the entire work to the Scratch Orchestra, each paragraph was a tribute to an individual composer—no.2 to Terry Riley and no.7 to La Monte Young, the fathers of repetitive and minimal music. The monster Paragraph 5 proved as confusing to play as its score and contemporary accounts promised; there were often as many things happening as there were performers —ten singers for the 'Ode Machines' (simultaneous vocal solos), ex-Scratchers Ilona Phombeah and Stefan Szczelkun performing the game-like 'Action and Number Scores', and several people involved in various improvisations. I was a little disconcerted by the lack of sensitivity (to directions in the score and to other players) exhibited in many of the improvisations, until Hugh Shrapnel (a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), who refused to play this work from Cardew's 'pre-political' period) told me that we were hearing a 'disciplined' version (which I took to mean

that he disapproved). After all, the Scratch Orchestra, with its anarchic foundation and numerous diverging opinions, cannot have conformed strictly to instructions; this performance may therefore have been more historically correct for its waywardness than I had originally thought. *The Great Learning* is certainly a work that needs exposure; perhaps the Almeida performance—a brave step on the part of the organisers—will mark the beginning of the end of the almost total indifference to Cardew's work that has prevailed in the past decade.

[1] See Gavin Bryars, 'Satie and the British', *Contact 25* (Autumn 1982), pp.4-14, and '"Vexations" and its Performers', *Contact 26* (Spring 1983), pp.12-20.

[2] Observation made by White during a conversation with the author on 9 July 1984.

[3] See David Jeffries, 'Tim Souster', *Contact 27* (Autumn 1983), pp.20-27, for more on these works; see also Tim Souster, 'Intermodulation: a Short History', *Contact 17* (Summer 1977), pp.3-6.

[4] Manuscript review of the American Society of University Composers 19th National Conference, April 1984.

[5] See Michael Hall, 'Birtwistle in Good Measure', *Contact 26* (Spring 1983), pp.34-6, for a review of the score.

[6] Marius Constant, programme note.

[7] See Keith Potter, 'Just the Tip of the Iceberg: Some Aspects of Gavin Bryars' Music', *Contact 22* (Summer 1981), pp.4-15.

[8] The best introduction to *The Great Learning* is still Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974); see also John Tilbury, 'Cornelius Cardew', *Contact 26* (Spring 1983), pp.4-12.

Christopher Fox

A Darmstadt Diary

33rd Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, July 1984

The Darmstadt Ferienkurse in July 1984 was an extraordinary event—a sort of explosive combination of successes and scandals, compounded by aesthetic and ideological confrontations, and a schedule so crowded that it was impossible for any one participant to come away with a complete picture of the event. What actually *happens* at Darmstadt these days? Well, one thing that is quite definitely not on the agenda is the protracted exposition by senior composers of their compositional practice. Instead of Stockhausen, Ligeti, Xenakis, et al discoursing for three or four days on their latest work, the predominant format in 1984 was a 90-minute lecture, afforded to about 35 composers, giving them the opportunity to introduce particular compositional preoccupations and play a few pieces.

Most of these composers had been invited to be present, and had been given free board and lodging, travel expenses and the guarantee of at least one piece performed in a concert; they became the focus of a certain amount of resentment, particularly when it emerged that they were also eligible for the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis.[1] As an invited composer myself (and fighting back the memory of the cynical (Groucho) Marxism 'I wouldn't join any club that would have me as a member'), I am perhaps less than ideally placed to judge the success of this major innovation, but it did seem to allow a healthy compromise between anarchy and the restraints of the old, patriarchal Darmstadt model.

Friedrich Hommel's choice of composers was, inevitably, cause for much comment. The July issue of the journal *MusikTexte*[2] published suggestions by a number of German composers and commentators for new directions for Darmstadt; some of these also nominated musicians they felt should be featured in the Ferienkurse. Few of the names listed in the Darmstadt prospectus appeared in *MusikTexte* and those that did were familiar new music stars like Feldman, Schnebel and Lachenmann. However, there was a remarkable congruence between the idea of Darmstadt as a more open and democratic forum for the exchange of ideas, advocated by many of the contributors, and the Darmstadt that Hommel actually achieved.[3] Particularly effective in this context were those people, like Klarenz Barlow, Morton Feldman, Peter Garland, Herbert Henck, Hans-Joachim Hespos, Erhard Grosskopf, Kevin Volans and Walter Zimmermann, who allowed themselves to become focal points for informal discussion outside the more structured lecture/seminar programme.

But at any new music gathering the most effective means of exchange is the music itself. What follows is a chronological account of my selective response to a few of the hundreds of pieces played.[4]

Monday 16 July

The first concert of the Ferienkurse is given by the German group, Ensemble Modern, who will be resident at the 1986 Ferienkurse, making possible, it is hoped, the performance of more ensemble works by participants rather than the endless stream of solo pieces. Their programme includes Wolfgang Rihm's *Bild*, which the composer regards as a piece in its own right although it may be given as live film music with the Bunuel-Dali film *Un chien andalou*. Tonight it is played during part of the film (the film lasts 20 minutes, the music about 9 minutes). Presumably this is to save time in a long concert, but in fact both music and film suffer: while the music plays with the film it is impossible to give either full attention; when the music stops the film seems to lose pace and coherence. As far as this performance allows one to judge, Rihm seems to have composed a brilliant analogue to *Un chien andalou*, creating musical equivalents of the gratuitously sensational images of the film. His ensemble of horn, trombone, percussion, piano, viola, cello, and double bass plays music intercutting different blocks of material, each of which is predominantly loud and aggressively dissonant.

Tuesday 17 July

The Clementi Trio (violin, cello and piano) open their concert with Clarence Barlough's *1981*, a wonderfully good-humoured piece which collages Clementi's *La chasse* (1788), Schumann's Trio (1847) and Ravel's Trio (1914). Using statistical operations, Barlough manipulates the instrumental parts so that each begins his piece in a different one of the source pieces; later on there are brief moments when all three players arrive together in the same piece at the same point, first Clementi, then Schumann, until Barlough ends with a magical cadence into Ravel.

The first half of the concert closes with five movements of Tom Johnson's (as yet unfinished) *Predictables*, the first and last of which use readily audible scalic processes. The lucidity of this music proves too much for some of the avant-garde backwoodsmen of the Darmstadt audience and in trying to repress sniggers they miss the more subtle logic of the middle movements. To my ears, Johnson's structures, which, as his programme note states, are 'far too interesting to bury underneath a lot of "expressive purposes" ', sound quite beautiful.

Friday 20 July

The evening concert is entitled 'The New Wind' and, appropriately, has its fair share of compositional flatulence. However, the title is intended to refer to the development of the larger members of the various woodwind families—contrabass and octobass flute, base clarinet, contrabass saxophone, and bass oboe —as solo virtuoso instruments, by Pierre-Yves Artaud, Roger Heaton, Daniel Kientzy and Nora Post respectively. As a whole the concert has something of the atmosphere of a freak show, with musicians entering the arena to do battle with monstrous instruments, and it is hard to believe that most of these instruments will ever be more than expensive novelties. The bass oboe may well be the exception, for although, as the composer of *Broadway Boogie* for bass oboe and tape, I am not entirely uninterested in its survival, its extraordinary timbre—part cor anglais, part saxophone—may well attract other composers. Indeed it has already attracted Chris Dench, whose brand-new little duet, *For Nora and Roger*, combining bass oboe and bass clarinet, is premièred in this concert.

Monday 23 July

The evening concert is given over to a single piece, *Seiltanz*, by Hans-Joachim Hespos. I have had my first encounter with Hespos (b.1938) and his music two days earlier, at an open rehearsal in Roger Heaton's clarinet class of his *Harry's Musike* (1972) for bass clarinet, and been struck by his concern for the quality of the performer's experience in playing new music, evidenced in his own scores by a relatively free time notation and a profusion of non-standard graphic symbols (both rare in a Darmstadt where new complexity is the dominant calligraphic style). Essential to Hespos's music is the alternation of violently opposed extremes—frenetic activity followed by stillness, squealing multiphonics followed by almost inaudible air noise: in *Seiltanz* this extremism is carried into the domain of theatre.

One by one six wind players, each exploring the possibilities of his instrument to the limit, enter a space bounded to the left by an array of percussion and a double bass player, to the right by a large iron water tank. Once these six are in position, ranged across the back of the space, the conductor enters, harangues them and then begins to conduct. Occasional outburst of hammering emerge from the tank. The final performer enters. He is an actor, who brandishes an enormous length of timber which he periodically smashes to the floor, all the while contorting his face and body as if in the grip of some terrible dementia. 40 minutes into the piece, when the wind players have returned to their places after menacing the audience, the actor leaves and attention shifts to the percussionist who has by now cut his way out of his iron prison with an oxy-acetylene torch and is trying to bring himself to sound the percussion instruments. Eventually he succeeds and then cannot bear to let them stop ringing. After 70 minutes the piece ends.

Seiltanz leaves most of its audience stunned, not only by the sheer brute physicality of the experience (the performers are close to exhaustion by the end) but also by its compositional risktaking. 'Seiltanz' translates as 'tight-rope walk', which Hespos sees as an appropriate analogy for the times in which we live, and *Seiltanz* teeters on the brink of the gratuitous sensationalism to which Absurdist theatre is always prey. Yet somehow, perhaps because of the musical commitment and theatrical plausibility of Manfred Reichert's Ensemble 13 and truly gripping performances by actor Harald Beutelstahl and percussionist Ulrik Spies, the piece totally convinces me.

Tuesday 24 July

The first of four evenings of string quartet music begins with the Arditti Quartet playing Volker Heyn's *Sirènes* (1984). Heyn (b.1938) was in his mid-thirties before he took up composition seriously and his music has a wayward originality rare in composers who have been through the full six years of processing in the German composer factories. Although rather too long for this listener, *Sirènes* has the same rapt intensity as the work of Scelsi and Heyn shares with Scelsi a fondness for music based around microtonally varying 2nds and 3rds and for an instrumental palette in which natural harmonics and variations of bow pressure produce much of the timbral variety.

The concert closes with Rihm's new quartet *Ohne Titel*, given a performance whose breathtaking virtuosity is heightened when Irvine Arditti's E string breaks early in the piece, only for him to continue to the end on three strings! The piece occupies Rihm's normal emotional range from *angstvoll* quietude to hysteria but, particularly in the context of much of the rest of the Arditti's repertory, his command of the whole expressive potential of the quartet medium from full-blooded unison writing to the most complex heterophony, and his ability here to construct music with an irresistible forward impetus combine to provide a thrilling musical experience.

Wednesday 25 July

In complete contrast, Feldman's Second Quartet (1983) is consistently quiet and uses none of the new techniques of 20th-century string writing. It is also extremely long—tonight's version, somewhat shortened, comes in at just under four hours and, although Feldman is not averse to listeners taking time out, the Quartet can surely only be heard *in toto*, since the extreme length of this and other recent Feldman pieces like *Crippled Symmetry* (1984) and *Triadic Memories* (1981) is as significant a feature of the composition as any single choice of pitch, timbre or duration. The Second Quartet is made up of many different pieces of material, repeated for a while, forgotten and then remembered again: for Feldman the act of memory is central to his making of the music and so too must it be for the listener as his capacity for attention rises and falls and material—new or familiar?—appears and disappears. Feldman says that he reintroduces material because 'I'm not sure of it, I want to hear it again', until eventually the piece simply 'dies of old age'. He also draws parallels with Proust—the act of recollection as also a remaking of memory—and with Beckett—the subtle adaptation of meaning through translation and retranslation. As with all Feldman's music, the combinations of pitch, timbre and register seem utterly right, quite inevitable, and the elegance of the writing is matched by the Kronos Quartet's perfect ensemble playing.

Debilitated by a surfeit of institutional food, music and late nights, I gave up after two hours and went for a Greek meal.

Thursday 26 July

The weekend has seen the Ferienkurse present a congress of composers and musicologists discussing tonality, one of the more vexed subjects in contemporary music circles these days. At the end of the congress things are, if that is possible, even more confused, since, with the honourable exceptions of Kevin Volans and Clarents Baalo, the composers have lectured only on their own 'tonal' habits and the musicologists have confined themselves to arcane theorising with little or no reference to any real new music. Chairman of the congress was Johannes Fritsch, once a member of Stockhausen's performing group and subsequently responsible for establishing the Feedback Studios in Cologne.

Tonight the Arditti Quartet, with double bass virtuoso Fernando Grillo, première his String Quintet. Since the early seventies, Fritsch's work has made much use of the harmonic series, rather than the tempered scale, as a source of pitch material. Early in the Ferienkurse Harry Halbreich has observed that 'whereas serial music is a system of organisation, spectral music is a type of material' and Fritsch's Quintet has lots of material but is woefully short of organisation. I find the piece baffling, particularly when a quasi-Middle Eastern tune (shades of Jonathan Richman's *Egyptian Reggae*) emerges occasionally from the murky soundworld.

Friday 27 July

Another four quartets, from the Kronos this time, including *Changes*, a set of four short movements by Philip Glass from the same mould as *Facades* in *Glassworks*. These are booed, presumably for being attractive and well-written. The major event of the programme is the world première of John Cage's *Thirty Pieces for String Quartet*, Cage's first work in the medium since the *String Quartet in Four Parts* of 1950. Nothing in the conception or organisation of the new quartet matches the staggering originality of its predecessor, for whereas in the 1950 piece Cage totally reinvented the string quartet, creating a quite new medium (this uniqueness can be the only reason why so few groups ever learn it), the new quartet's soundworld is that of the conventional, post-Bartók avant-garde string work. Indeed the piece reminds me most strongly of the Boulez *Livre pour quatuor* but, thanks to the chance operations, with attention thrown onto the sounds rather than onto structural considerations. This reminiscence may well be due to the seating arrangements imposed on the Kronos players by the demands of a live radio broadcast and the rather intractable space in which the concert is given: Cage's instruction that the players be seated as far apart as possible cannot be realised.

Saturday 28 July

The intolerance of sections of the Darmstadt fraternity resurfaces during the American composer Alvin Curran's performance of his *Love Songs* (1984). Curran has lived in Rome since 1965 and is perhaps best known as a member of Musica Elettronica Viva. Like much of MEV's work, *Love Songs* is part improvisation, part predetermined composition and uses a mixture of acoustic resources—Curran's voice, piano and harmonica—and electro-acoustic devices—a tabletop full of Serge Tcherepnin-designed modular units—together with tape. The piece opens with a Korean melody, sung by Song-On Cho and multiplied by delay units; then Curran begins a series of smoochy jazz harmonies on the piano which is immediately met with cries of protest from a section of the audience. Curran responds with what appears to be a vocal imitation of these hecklers, rapidly building it into a dense electronic texture which remains more or less constant for the remaining 40 minutes of his performance. The mix of tape—much of which consists of recordings of environmental sound—and live electronics is thoroughly absorbing but, quite clearly, the aesthetic arrogance of a relatively small number of listeners has restricted the range of material that Curran feels he can use in the performance. Paradoxically, this sort of audience participation is in part a product of the openness of the new Darmstadt and virtually every shade of the musical spectrum is booed at some stage: however, the virulence of the attack on Curran is remarkable.

Later the same evening there is a concert of pieces written by, or prepared for performance by, Ferienkurse participants. As is the case in the later concerts, it is evident that some very ordinary pieces by participant composers are being played by some excellent participant performers (a disparity noted by the jury of the Kranichstein prize who award prizes to five performers, including Nancy Ruffer and Alan Brett, but to only three composers). In this concert Sara Stowe's performance of Kagel's *Recitativarie* (1971-2) for singing harpsichordist provides the moment of enlightenment, to some extent because hers is a splendidly committed representation (complete with nun's habit) of the work's blasphemous protagonist, but also because the imaginative audacity of the piece is in such marked contrast to the turgid examples of *stilo SPNMo* that surround it. As further welcome relief, Clarence Balo's three-and-a-half-hour *Text Musik* (1972) for piano is being performed by Thomas Silvestri in a room which Barleeuw has thought-fully equipped with mattresses, wine and subdued lighting.

Sunday 29 July

A day-long marathon of new music from 11 a.m. until early the next day. Little catches my ear until late evening when the pianist Helmut Freitag plays *Six Nocturnes* (1981) by Carlo Alessandro Landini. As their title may suggest, these short pieces are almost, but not quite, Chopin: Landini has taken Chopin left-hand parts and elaborated them canonically to produce two-hand textures. Darmstadt's favourite terms of abuse—'kitsch', 'dilettante', and 'unprofessional'—fly around; at least the last of these is quite inappropriate to these skilfully fashioned pieces.

Monday 30 July

The last day of concerts yields another well written Italian piece, *Fraggmento* for solo viola by Aldo Brizzi, in a fine performance by the Rumanian, Stefan Georghiu. The piece spins a tremulous but continuous thread of sound from the instrument, with double-stopped left-hand tremoli predominant. Brizzi reappears in the small hours of Tuesday morning as conductor of Horatiu Radulescu's *Iubiri* (1981), the orchestral climax to an all-Radulescu concert that begins after one and finishes a little before four in the morning. Due perhaps to fatigue, perhaps to Radulescu's stylistic consistency, it is the first two pieces I enjoy most: *The Inner Time* (which Roger Heaton premièred in London in April 1983) and *Das Andere* (1984) for cello. *The Inner Time* is given in a new version in which Heaton is joined by four more clarinettists, placed around the audience, who 'amplify' the solo clarinet by playing the pitches

whose internal elements he is currently exploring. The result is quite wonderful, the stratospherically high clarinet harmonics ringing in the resonant acoustic of the gymnasium, generating an eerie, other-worldly calm. This is followed by an equally spellbinding performance by Rohan de Saram of *Das Andere* in a new version for cello (it was premièred at La Rochelle as a viola piece). *Das Andere* is, at 17 minutes, quite short for a Radulescu piece and has an expressive intensity that is also unusual for this rhapsodic composer; de Saram's performance is all the more extraordinary since he has learnt the piece in a week.

And so to bed.

[1] In fact, of the three composers who shared the composition section of the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis, only Chris Dench was in the invited category.

[2] *MusikTexte* is an excellent new periodical, published five times a year and available from Postfach 30 04 80, D-5000 Köln 30. Recent issues have included material (scores, interviews, articles) on Cage, Feldman, Wolff, Stockhausen, Barlow, Globokar and many less well known musicians.

[3] For example, Ernstalbrecht Stiebler writes: 'Darmstadt must be a forum for composers. There must also be a lively debate—through discussion but also through the music itself, in particular through major performances. New Music is no subject for a summer academy. The courses in Darmstadt have the opportunity, and they must use them, to get beyond the limited format of seminar and congress communication. Otherwise a new addition to the old "new" academia threatens.'

[4] For those in search of exhaustive documentation of performances at the 1984 Darmstadt, I recommend the 20th edition of the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, which Schott's will publish in early 1986.

Hilary Bracefield

Musica Nova 1984

Sixth International Festival of Contemporary Music, Glasgow, 16-22 September 1984

I had already written most of my review of the sixth Musica Nova festival when I read Keith Potter's article 'Huddersfield: a Retrospective' in *Contact 28*,[1] and immediately found many of his thoughts chiming with my own. It was my first Musica Nova, but there, too, were the other regular professional festival attenders, the musical press, the BBC producers, the music publishers' representatives; there, too, one hunted fairly unsuccessfully for some of Glasgow's numerous music students, unless they were to be found behind a ticket desk or selling programmes; there, too, one had the uneasy feeling that the audiences contained rather fewer Glaswegians than one would hope; there, too, one fell to musing as to who the festival was for.

Musica Nova has, of course, some crucial differences from the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. It's not an annual event, but planned to occur every two or three years, and although one director—Professor Hugh Macdonald of the Music Department of the University of Glasgow—is an academic, the other, Fiona Grant, is the administrator of the Scottish National Orchestra, and the important contribution of that body, together with that of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, gives a special dimension to the festival. And this year collaboration with the Society for the Promotion of New Music brought their annual composers' weekend forum to Glasgow for a worthwhile jaunt north, adding an even more atypical slant. Glaswegians who are avid attenders of Musica Nova may have been dismayed by this influx of southerners, but the organisers were welcoming and disgruntled natives were hard to find; in fact natives of any sort were thin on the ground. SPNM habitués may have been devastated by the loss of their cosy slanging sessions, and even at the loss of their weekend (for the SPNM discussions and workshops ran from Tuesday to Friday), but although there was some underground grumbling, presumably only those who had been attracted to the range of concerts in addition to the forum sessions and who could spare a week had turned up anyway.

I certainly found the event successful and stimulating for myself, but I still wondered who Musica Nova is meant to benefit. The presence of the SPNM delegates disguised the thinness of the rest of the audience for many of the forums and discussions, and some of the concerts, too. I heard it said more than once, rather startlingly, that Musica Nova was for the benefit of the Scottish National Orchestra itself: to give the orchestra work to get their teeth into, to make sure that they had a chance to perform contemporary music. This suggests that the works, even the commissions, rarely enter their repertoire, but are seen merely as some sort of challenge. This will hardly lead to a healthy attitude to contemporary music among either the orchestra's players or Scottish audiences, though it points up the perennial dilemma all orchestras face of how best to programme new music. At least the SNO had already planned to give Elliott Carter's Piano Concerto further airings, and one hopes they plan to use the other works as well.

But all the trappings of *parachutisme* that Keith Potter found at Huddersfield—the arrival of the new music intelligentsia for a few days at an outlying post of civilisation, the sucking of the musical blood, and swift decamping—were in evidence in Glasgow, too, and if the organisers of this unsuccessful week do anything before the next, they must address the problem of getting more locals into more of the events.

The main outlines of the festival, despite the presence of the SPNM, seemed much the same as those of previous ones, in that the organisers featured four visiting composers, three of whom on this occasion received commissions. There is obviously more money around for this than Huddersfield can command, but it means that they look for composers who have some track record of orchestral writing and who can provide chamber works as well. Musica Nova has stuck its neck out in the past, inviting composers such as Morton Feldman (1976), Tona Scherchen-Hsaio and Brian Ferneyhough (1979), and they ran into problems playing Milton Babbitt in 1981. Possibly they played safer this time, but we had four interesting enough choices: Elliott Carter as a very senior American, Per Norgard as a senior European, John Casken as an up-and-coming British composer, and a token Scot, Lyell Cresswell (actually a New Zealander who made his home first in Edinburgh and now in Glasgow as the Cramb-Hinrichsen Fellow in composition at the University of Glasgow). Commissions were awarded by the SNO to Cresswell and Norgard, and via the BBC to Casken. Programmes may have fitted together by happy chance at times,

but the end result suggested some felicitous planning, with a useful retrospective of music by each featured composer. As well as a number of soloists such as Jane Manning, John McCabe, Alexander Baillie, Ursula Oppens, and the Danish percussionist Gert Mortensen, Lontano and the Elsinore Ensemble of Denmark had been engaged both to give concerts and to rehearse the SPNM composers' pieces in workshops. These combined the Musica Nova Chandos Award with the usual activities of the SPNM Weekend, and perhaps led to some misunderstandings, for the rules governing the choice of the works for the concert of submissions were not clear to composers. The Chandos Award itself was given to a tape piece, *Uppvaknande* ('Awakening') by John Michael Clarke.

Carter must indeed be gratified by the exposure he has received of late in the British Isles, and he was graciously in residence for most of Musica Nova. He must know most of what he says in seminars off by heart now, as he travels round the world giving them, but it was still illuminating to hear him declare at the beginning of the week, 'I admire Stravinsky's music uncritically', and then to hear the suite from his unmistakably Stravinskian ballet *The Minotaur* (1946). This was performed in a concert by the BBC SSO under Richard Pittman, and one wonders why such an exciting big mainstream work for orchestra is not performed more often.

By also hearing the Cello Sonata (1948), played by Baillie and McCabe, and four of the *Eight Pieces for Four Timpani* (1950/66), performed by Gert Mortensen, we were led into the next phase of Carter's writing, and his obsessive experiments with time and motion, although the jazz interest is what one notes in the Cello Sonata. The music of the decades which followed the crystallisation of Carter's style were neatly encapsulated by performances of the Variations for Orchestra (1956), the Piano Concerto (1964/65), *A Mirror on Which to Dwell* (1975) for soprano and chamber ensemble, and *Night Fantasies* for piano (1980), involving the SNO conducted by Matthias Bamert, the pianist Ursula Oppens, Lontano and the soprano Jane Manning.

Again, to hear Carter discussing these pieces, even within the well-worn grooves also now documented in David Schiff's book on the composer,[2] illuminated the performances. Thus Carter's explanation of the political climate in Berlin at the time he wrote the Piano Concerto while living there helped one accept its brooding and harsh atmosphere, while his description of counterpoint lessons with Nadia Boulanger, and particularly his assertion that since that time he has always taken pains to make every individual line in a texture melodic, whether the listener notices or not, helped to suggest a way into the complicated world of his late writing. A further aid was the dedicated assurance of Ursula Oppens in the Piano Concerto and in *Night Fantasies*. We also heard a tape of the recent virtuoso piece for guitar, *Changes*,[3] which suggested that the refining of Carter's idiom, evident in *Night Fantasies*, is continuing. The composer certainly seems to be full of energy and ideas, and his presence at the festival was a tonic.

The presence of the Danish composer, Per Norgard, was also immensely stimulating. Flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, big and shambling, he loped amiably around the festival venue, always approachable, and combining gentle humour with a keen intellect. He inhabits a vivid sound world which he has tamed by an elaborate private compositional system built both on what he calls the 'infinity series' and on phase patterns which set up tensions in both harmony and rhythm. The early *Solo intimo* for cello (1953-54) hinted at this sense of structure and direction, while the tape piece *The Enchanted Forest* (1968), though an experiment for him and overlong, showed his ear for subtle infinite variety. The Elsinore Ensemble with Bodil Gumoes (soprano) performed a setting of words from Walt Whitman's poem *Seadrift* written in 1977 in which the wild romanticism of the words well suited the Nordic expressiveness (echoes of Sibelius) which Norgard allows himself on occasion.

The bulk of the music heard, however, was recent, and related both to his latest explorations of phasings and to his keen sense of tone colour. It was all virtuosic too. *Plutonian Ode* (1983), based on a worrying poem by Allen Ginsberg, and performed by Jane Manning (for whom it was written) and Baillie, is a recitative and aria of disquieting intensity. The *I Ching Studies* for percussion solo (1982) include tiny moments of oriental inscrutability and a powerful frenzied finale as Mortensen's exciting performance showed. *Achilles and the Tortoise* for piano solo (1983) is a teasing and witty demonstration of phasing between juxtaposed black and white note patterns. It never quite became minimalist (a movement Norgard appears to disparage), retaining its own originality.

In the light of Norgard's exposition of his methods and ideas and as a result of hearing such a variety of his music (though I was sorry to miss the performance of Symphony no.4), it was rather a pity that his commissioned work, *Illumination*, was heard so early in the festival before his idiom had become familiar. The immediate impression was of a tone poem, a virtuoso mood piece for full orchestra, or at times for sections of the orchestra, which built up impressively to several successive climaxes, but with a surface simplicity which belied the extent of the organisation underneath. Indeed, the composer has recognised that the title was leading listeners to make wrong connections about the work. He has retitled it *Burn*, making a pun of the two meanings of the word, the sense of 'being on fire' and of a 'stream' (of water). He hopes by this change to direct our thoughts to 'the two characters which pervade the 12-minute long work: circling, eddying and heavily-falling streams',[4] rather than to thoughts of festive illumination, as at Christmas, which he thinks the previous title and his programme note suggested.

There is no doubt that John Casken is finding an idiom more assured and suave with every piece. *Ia Orana, Gauguin* (1978) and *Firewhirl* (1979-80), given by Jane Manning, with John McCabe and Lontano respectively, both have an obvious dramatic element, but if *Ia Orana, Gauguin* is rather self-conscious in its homage to Debussy and the evocation of its atmosphere, *Firewhirl* has a single-minded intensity in its frightening march to its very Freudian climax in which both soloist and ensemble can revel. I particularly enjoyed the instrumental piece *Masque* (1982) for oboe and chamber ensemble (performed by Douglas Boyd and members of the BBC SSO), which had a depth of conception and structure which will reward many hearings. Two new pieces by the composer were presented. *Piper's Linn* (1984) was an enchanting piece for the Northumbrian small-pipes and electronic tape, written for and performed by Richard Butler, in which the simple resource of a two-octave chanter and drone is extended magically by the tape accompaniment, also derived from sounds of the pipes.

Orion over Farne (1984), commissioned by the SNO, immediately grips the imagination with bold writing for the full orchestra, not so much as an entity but in juxtaposed and opposed sectional writing, brass, percussion and divided strings being particu-

larly prominent. But there is space within the four sections of the work for haunting solo passages for the wind as the extra-musical idea which inspired the piece develops: a portrait of Orion the hunter, his journeyings, and his happy fate, immortality as a star in the heavens. Casken should not be ashamed of having written a symphonic poem, for it seems to have allowed him to unleash more fully the emotional and expressive side of his writing which is often held in check.

Lyell Creswell's idiom strikes one as coming from a refreshingly individual voice. It was obvious in *The Silver Pipes of Ur* (1982), an absolutely idiosyncratic wind quintet written for Lontano, which to me convincingly demonstrated a marvellously different way to write for a familiar combination by exploiting similarities rather than differences, and by daring to take his ideas further than many of the audience wanted to go. It could be heard, too, in *Prayer for the cure of a sprained back* (1979), sung by Jane Manning, in which little quirks of Maori chant gently informed the beautiful solo line. It is there in the music of the films he works on with Lesley Keen. But in both the big works heard in the festival, *O!* for orchestra, receiving its British première, and the new Cello Concerto, despite carefully worked out thematic and melodic material, there was a worrying obsession with tension-building rather than rhythmic movement which weakened the effect of individual movements, reducing each to a staticity that seemed to be limiting the composer's imagination. Nevertheless the Cello Concerto boasted a particularly beautiful slow movement in which the cello's cantilena was accompanied in unison by a succession of orchestral instruments in a simplicity which was compelling.

The two orchestras rightly used up their time in playing music by the featured composers, and both conductors, Richard Pittman and Matthias Bamert, showed enthusiasm for the music tempered with the correct amount of meticulousness. The orchestral concerts in the SNO Centre (not the most suitable place) should be milestones in Glasgow's musical life.

While the solo and chamber concerts also offered music by the featured composers, they were spiced with a variety of other music. Many of the works in two electro-acoustic concerts, one directed by Stephen Montague, the other by Stephen Arnold, have been toting around the circuit for a fair while, but drew good and sympathetic audiences. Alexander Baillie (in a ridiculously long programme), Jane Manning and Lontano presented recent music by British composers, but so much of it was in a 'mainstream avant-garde', even sub-Webernian, idiom, that one worrying dimension of the festival was an undercurrent of amusement or scoffing at any whiff of minimalism, neo-romanticism or what Norgard termed several times the 'new simplicity'. There was little enough to be heard, but Ursula Oppens's performances of an overtly political piece, *Kwanju* (1980) by Yuji Takahashi, and the revised version of Alvin Curran's moving elegy to Cornelius Cardew, *For Cornelius*, were received by most of the audience with amused incomprehension.

In this context, the performances of the Danish Elsinore Ensemble, directed by Karl Aage Rasmussen, assumed great importance. I wish I knew what was in their minds, for their programmes seemed designed to pander to the worst forebodings of a hostile audience. The first programme was a late night one, and I assumed that a light and humorous programme had been deliberately chosen, to be

balanced by more substantial works in the second concert. Here again, however, the music by Poul Ruders, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Ole Buck, and Ib Norholm was so artless as to miss being artful, showing an obsession with repetition and variation of simple diatonic material and of quotation and conversion of music of composers like Bach and Beethoven, but without either enough muscle to hold the attention, or enough audacity to shock. Perhaps it was all a plot by Rasmussen, for the most substantial pieces played (except for Norgard's *Seadrift*) were his.

But the Danes' music at least stimulated genuine reactions—in fact, it was a pity that the concerts were scheduled at the very end of the week, for the rest of the festival could have been livened by real controversy. Nonetheless the sixth Musica Nova gave a splendid opportunity for a thorough immersion in the music of four fascinating composers, and a worthwhile week of music overall. But is it really being put on just for the good of the SNO? As an 'international' festival, it obviously sets out to bring music from round the world to Scotland, but this particular week presented very little music from Scotland to the world. At a time when the Scottish Arts Council is contemplating axing its grant to the Scottish Music Archive, a witless decision, it would be a pity if there wasn't some place for local composers in each festival. After all, the *parachutistes* will always be there.

[1] *Contact 28* (Autumn 1984), pp.41-46.

[2] David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London: Eulenberg Books, 1983), reviewed by Roger Heaton in *Contact 28* (Autumn 1984), pp.33-34.

[3] Now recorded on Bridge Records BDG 2004, and available in the United Kingdom through the Society for the Promotion of New Music, 10 Stratford Place, London W1N 9AE.

[4] Composer's note attached to the score which is published by Chester Music, Eagle Court, London EC1M 5QD.

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John Rahn, editor

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