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5th February : Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

(University of Birmingham)

Contemporary Music Concert of Works by Goehr, Stravinsky, Debussy, Connolly, Boulez and Ravel given by members of the Nash Ensemble with Judith Pearce, Meriel Dickinson and Ronald Lumsden.

It was a pleasure to find that this concert really was of 20th century music, for in it we were presented with sufficient glances at the Kaleidoscope of modern music to be able to cover nearly all schools of composition from Debussy to Justin Connolly, from Ravel to Boulez.

The programme opened, perhaps rather unfortunately, with a performance of Alexander Goehr's "Nonomiya", which made little impression on an otherwise responsive audience. The three older works in the concert : (Stravinsky's "Three Shakespeare Songs", Debussy's Sonata for flute, viola and harp, and Ravel's "Chansons Madecasses") all received good performances, although I felt that the Debussy, and to a lesser extent the Stravinsky, would have been even better with more accurate intonation and rhythm on the viola. Meriel Dickinson sang the Stravinsky and Ravel songs with noticeable accuracy and great feeling for the phrasing. Her pleasant voice suits the Ravel particularly well.

The focus of the second half was, presumbly, from the construction of the programme, the first performance of Justin Connolly's Triad V for violin, cello and clarinet. Mr. Connolly showed feeling in his writing for the instruments, and a good use of ensemble, but that, I fear, was about as far as the piece went. There was a distinct lack of style and cohesion in a piece which lasted about ten times as long as its musical interest should have allowed. The result, I'm afraid, was boredom, as a catalogue of instrumental effects was reeled off.

For me, the climx of the concert was a superb performance of Boulez' Sonatina for flute and piano. This work is immensely difficult, and the performers, Judith Pearce and Ronald Lumsden, coped admirably. The playing of Judith Pearce throughout the evening was of the highest standard and was the highlight of an enjoyable concert.

PETER FAIRHURST.

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