

# contact

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## Citation

Potter, Keith. 1973-1974. 'Review of Stockhausen, *Life and Work* by Karl H. Wörner'. *Contact*, 7. pp. 34-36. ISSN 0308-5066.



the final form of the new book. Bill Hopkins has translated Worner's revision, re-ordered its contents and updated it in a few places - though there is no more than passing reference to works written after Kurzwellen (1968) with the exception of Op. 1970 (Kurzwellen mit Beethoven).

Worner did not attempt a "detached", critical assessment of Stockhausen. Instead he chose to compile what amounts to a reference book, consisting of a list of works (with discography), Stockhausen's notes on the works, biographical and other journalistic material and a series of chapters on some of the composer's particular preoccupations: "New forms in music", "Electronic music", "Spatial location in music" and "New music and society".

The difference is that, where reference books are normally expected to be objective and factual, this one is highly **subjective**, if still superficially factual. The reason is that much of it consists of undigested Stockhausen - some of which, incidentally, has already appeared in print, e.g. the composer's notes on the works are largely taken from record sleeves.

In fact, I find it hard to believe that Worner has really understood what Stockhausen is saying, still less the music itself. The whole book exhibits a total dependence on what comes straight from the "horse's mouth". Not that critics and analysts don't all too frequently find themselves in this position, but Worner's ability to evaluate his received opinion by reference to the actual music is placed in doubt. As with too many of Stockhausen's disciples, the author's consistently adulatory tone surrounds his subject in a hushed atmosphere of reverential awe which effectively prevents all penetration to the music.

This is not to say that the book has no value. Many of its details are fascinating: Stockhausen analysing Mozart, the concepts involved in the composer's serial music ("Serial music demands serial thought"), and Stockhausen's admirably unreverential attitude towards the music of the past, even Webern and Messiaen. (On becoming fascinated by the latter's Fourth Etude at Darmstadt in 1951, Stockhausen resolved to study with the composer in Paris. "There", he says, "I could find out how much Messiaen had learnt from others and how much was his own contribution.") Even the references to all pre-Stockhausian attempts at spatial music (described as "antecedents") are endearing. Worner gives the impression that all the composers from Willaert to Ives were just waiting for Stockhausen the man of genius to put their fumbleings to shame. (Perhaps he is right.....)

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But I am waiting for four books which will, I hope, provide what we really need on Stockhausen at the moment. Incredibly, the three volumes of the composer's collected writings (published in German as Aufsätze) have still not become available in English. Richard Toop has translated the first two of these, but at the moment doesn't appear to have found a publisher. Jonathan Harvey has written a book on the earlier music, to be published by Faber (date unknown). Two other surveys are at present in progress: by Richard Toop (UE) and Robin Maconie (OUP). These will surely provide the detailed critical examination of Stockhausen's music that is now so urgently needed.

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