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Reports and Book Reviews

THE FIRST AMERICAN MUSIC CONFERENCE at the University of Keele, 18-21 April, 1975

THE LITERATURE OF AMERICAN MUSIC, a fully annotated catalogue of the books and song collections in Exeter University Library, compiled by David Horn The American Arts Documentation Centre in association with The University Library, Exeter, 1972 (no price given, few copies left)

CHARLES IVES AND THE AMERICAN BAND TRADITION: A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE, by Jonathan Elkus

American Arts Pamphlet No. 4, The American Arts Documentation Centre, University of Exeter, 1974 (£0.60 or \$2.50)

THE AMERICAN MUSIC HANDBOOK, by Christopher Pavlakis

Collier Macmillan, London 1974 (£12.50)
The Free Press, New York

KEITH POTTER

The articles on the work now being done for American music in Britain at the Universities of Exeter and Keele are intended to point up two facts. First, they give some guidance for the British reader about where he can go for information about American music, knowledge of which is still all too scanty and inexact over here. Secondly, as Peter Dickinson has already observed, these articles draw attention to the steadily increasing awareness of the importance of American music to us in Britain, for which centres like those at Exeter and Keele provide a focus.

Recently, the attention centred on Keele, where the First American Music Conference took place from 18-21 April, presented by the Music Department and its Centre for American Music, and the United States Information Service. Eleven speakers presented papers which ranged over a wide spectrum of American music, from that of the early 19th century Bohemian/American composer Heinrich, to the most recent available music of Christian Wolff.

Many of the speakers, and most of the audience of course, were British, but an international element was added to the conference at the very start by the young Danish composer, performer and writer, Karl Aage Rasmussen, who gave a fascinating paper on the use of quotation in music, bringing a continental European perspective to the subject which revealed a great deal about the problems of 20th century music as a whole, not just that of America. Jane Waugh gave a talk on aspects of choice and chance in the music of Lukas Foss, and Marc Capalbo launched an attempt on the analysis of Milton Babbitt's Second String Quartet.

Ives and Varèse, as the 'classics' of 20th century American music, were subjected to more extended treatment, with two views presented on each. David

Wooldridge, an English conductor who now lives mainly in the States and whose book on Ives, From the Steeples and the Mountains, has just become available in this country (see the next issue of CONTACT for a round-up of recently published books on this composer), and the American composer and writer, Robert P. Morgan, presented different aspects of Ives: the first anecdotal, the second more philosophical and musical with some discussion of the use of space and spatial characteristics in Ives's music, not confining himself to their most obvious applications. Mr. Morgan is at present engaged in further studies in this field which should prove interesting.

Two views of Varèse were presented by David Harold Cox, who is writing a Ph.D. thesis on the composer, and Paul Griffiths, the former being illustrated by the performance of a recently discovered early song by Varèse (1906), which the composer seemingly chose to forget in compiling his list of surviving works.

Arnold Whittall, of University College, Cardiff, placed Elliott Carter in the European as well as American traditions, giving many insights into the music of this composer who is so often talked about - by other composers in particular - but about whose musical processes far too little is really known. Tim Souster spoke about the influence of 60s rock music on American composers, Michael Nyman introduced the music of Heinrich to a wondering world with the aid of Roger Smalley at the piano, and I gave a paper on aspects of political music today with special reference to the recent works of Christian Wolff. All the conference papers will be published in book form in due course, and will be available from the Department of Music, University of Keele, KEELE, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG.

Other events included the showing of the BBC TV centenary film on Ives and Harry Partch's film, Music Studio; performances of Cage's Theatre Piece and Satie's Le Piège de Méduse by the Musik Circus of Keele University; a concert of Ives, Carter, Copland, Cage and Feldman given by Meriel and Peter Dickinson and Roger Smalley and recorded by the BBC; a late night concert of Heinrich and Wolff (German names, but very American music), and the BBC forum which Peter Dickinson has already mentioned. A whole week's Second American Music Conference is planned for July 1976.

While Keele has only begun to build itself up as a centre for American music in the last year or so - Peter Dickinson, who is responsible for much of this, was appointed Professor of Music there in April 1974 - Exeter University's American Arts Documentation Centre has been amassing material for some time, as the music librarian David Horn's own article shows.

His compilation, The Literature of American Music, is a useful guide to what is available though, as Horn himself says, it is already out of date and is currently being revised and expanded to include not only the new additions at Exeter, but other literature as well. This new edition will be published next year by the Scarecrow Press and we hope to review this, hopefully extremely useful, volume then.

As revealed by the current edition, Exeter's collection is particularly strong on the vernacular traditions and pre-20th century music, areas which we are sometimes apt to forget in our concern for the contemporaneity of American music. But the work done at Exeter by, for example, David Mayor on the Fluxus movement, is proof of the collection's considerable scope. It is a source of which researchers, and all those interested in American music in this country, should be aware. As with the set-up at Keele, which has the largest Department of American Studies in this country, the links with those working in other areas of scholarship should be an invaluable aid to the progress of both creative work and research, as well as showing that these institutions are working examples of the fruitful breakdown of the barriers between art forms in this century.

Recently the American Arts Documentation Centre at Exeter has been publishing a pamphlet series at extremely modest prices: a check-list of the periodical publications of Sylvia Plath, a selected bibliography of Black literature, and associate director Mick Gidley's own catalogue of American paintings in British public collections.

The most recent addition to this series is the American composer and bandsman, Jonathan Elkus's useful monograph on Ives and the American band tradition, issued for the Ives centenary. The 16 pages of the main text are packed with information and informed opinion and there is also an introductory biographical note on Ives by David Horn, a checklist of Ives's published music for band and even four plates of music examples. More monographs of this type would fill many gaps in the existing literature admirably: Exeter should immediately commission some more on music to follow those currently in preparation on the American theatre on the London stage and John Ford's westerns. Orders for these pamphlets should be addressed to The Registry, Northcote House, University of Exeter, EXETER, EX4 4QJ.

The tracking down of information on American music both present and past is a daunting undertaking, even given unlimited time and money. The problems of researching into the present are not always sufficiently appreciated by scholars working in the past, who sometimes seem to imagine that all you need lies conveniently on the composer's or publisher's desk or on the other end of a phone - and that you can get it. That personal barriers can be greater than historical ones, and even more insurmountable on occasion, is known to all who've ever tried working in contemporary studies: what do you do when the man at the other end of the phone won't reply or when the American postal service (worse even than our own)

fails you, or when anyone along your line of communication lacks the time or the urge to pass essential information your way? Or, conversely, if you're John Cage and fed up with the continual stream of letters and interviews which prevent you from working, what attitude do you take to the present and how much do you tell, never mind keeping an eye on the future? Of course, just like his counterpart in historical studies, the student of contemporary music just tries and tries again until all the leads are exhausted. But when those leads are covered up on account of the personal feelings of living people, justified or unjustified, the contemporary researcher can meet the kind of brick wall of which the historical researcher has little inkling.

These are the kind of reasons why students of American music, as well as a lot else besides, should be eternally grateful to John Vinton and his team for the work they have done in producing the Dictionary of 20th Century Music, which was reviewed in CONTACT 10. Never mind the mistakes and omissions (though we do mind really, of course) or the fact that inclusion has apparently simply depended upon what came into the office: 'erratic' rather than 'comprehensive' would seem to be the more appropriate description of the total compilation. There are still enough leads in Vinton's book to keep me happy for a good while to come yet, while I eagerly await a second edition which will hopefully contain a lot more material that the editor has received since the copy deadline.

Hard on Vinton's heels, though far less well publicised, comes Christopher Pavlakis's The American Music Handbook. The area covered - in just two more pages than Vinton but using a larger type face - is much wider, the aim rather different and the coverage of contemporary American composers and their music much scantier. Pavlakis's plan is "to bring together information on all areas of organized musical activity in the United States" and his book falls into 14 sections.

We start with organisations: "those serving music or which are related to music, wholly or in part, directly or indirectly", e.g. the first four entries are the Accordion Teachers' Guild International, the Acoustical Society of America, Inc., the Amateur Chamber Music Players, Inc., and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Addresses and an idea of the scope of activities are given as in all the appropriate succeeding sections. Then come sections on instrumental and vocal ensembles, opera and dance companies, plus those peculiarly American phenomena, the 'Music Tents' and the 'Summer Theaters'. Then performers (highly selective, of course) with an idea of their recorded repertoires; 205 American composers with dates of birth, university (if any), lists of works on record and publisher(s), and also including articles on 'The Status of the Composer', 'Compositional Diversity and Productivity', 'Copyright Registration: 1940-71', 'Copyright Registrations for Music' (both with tables), 'Composers and Employment' and a list of Pulitzer Prizewinners to 1972.

After this we have music festivals, contests and awards; 'Music and Education' including useful lists of universities and colleges offering music instruction with heads of departments named, music libraries, summer

music camps, degrees available and some statistics; radio and television including lists of stations; 'Music Industries', including record companies, hi-fi manufacturers, music publishers and those involved in the making and selling of instruments down to the wholesale level; music periodicals; concert managers; and, finally, a section on foreign festivals, competitions, awards and music publishers which cannot, of course, be aiming at completeness.

Quite a task for one man, that. Pavlakis has undeniably produced a useful reference volume of considerable proportions by the sweat of his own brow - and, apparently, out of the depths of his own pocket. His introduction, in which he tells of the problems that the undertaking involved and the amazing lack of co-operation, financial and otherwise, that he experienced from a good many unmentioned people, should make salutary reading for anyone who does not appreciate the implications of my earlier remarks.

So it might seem churlish to remark that The American Music Handbook falls somewhere between Vinton on the one hand and something like our own British Music Yearbooks on the other, neither a detailed scholarly tool like the former, or a ready-reference directory like the latter. It isn't always easy to find what you want and quite a lot of cross-referencing is sometimes necessary, though the index is helpful here. And Pavlakis's idea of what constitutes an area of "organized musical activity" does not appear to run to the realms of popular musics, jazz or anything much outside the Western concert tradition. This is a pity, but then, as with Vinton, who makes the same broad decision, the book would have become at least twice the size and probably completely unviable if the editorial policy became all-inclusive in this way.

While it is inevitably already becoming dated, as so many of the details with which he deals change so fast, Pavlakis's claim to have provided more permanent information that should make the book useful for several years would also seem to have some grounds: at least what I have described as the 'leads' remain for further investigation. That I have already consulted the book about a dozen times during the editorial work on the rest of this issue seems proof enough of its usefulness to me in my work, at any rate. And as a record of a specific period in American musical history it also, as the author says, has a certain value. Since it is CONTACT's policy to disseminate information about 20th century music of all kinds, I am pleased to recommend Pavlakis's labour of love to our readers as a highly informative source of general information about music and musicians in America today, and as an invaluable book for the record collector and for 'the trade'.

I hope that future issues of CONTACT will contain further information about where to get hold of American material, so that we may act more effectively in putting our readers in touch with the music.

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