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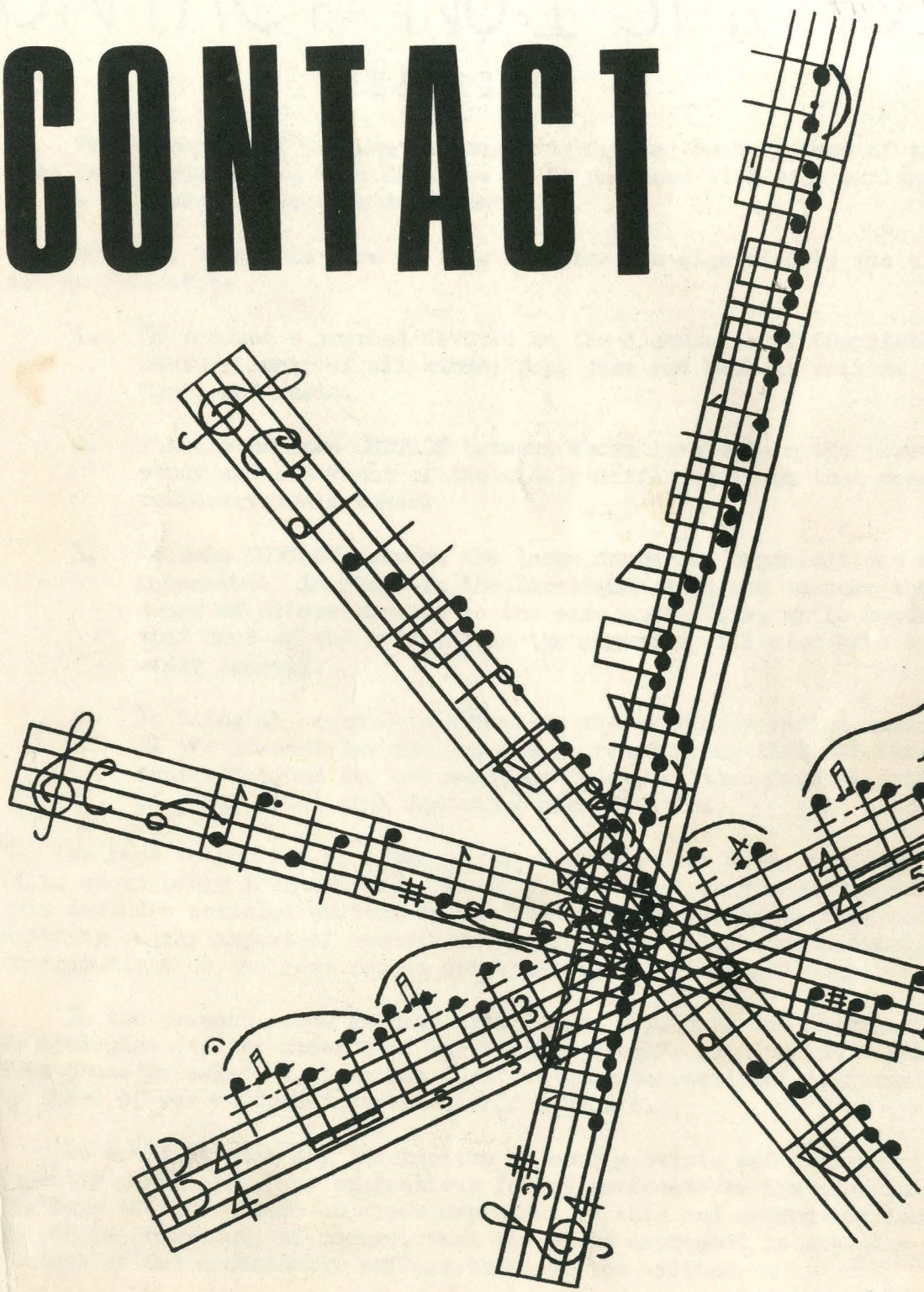

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CONTACT No 1 SPRING 1971

E D I T O R I A L

The launching of yet another magazine devoted to an aspect of the Arts in the Birmingham area deserves to be prefaced with some explanation of its purpose and for whom it is intended.

Briefly, then, the aims of this magazine, as signified by its title are as follows :-

1. To produce a journal devoted to the discussion of twentieth century music of all kinds; pop, jazz and folk as well as "serious" music.

2. Thereby to make CONTACT between those involved in the practice, study and enjoyment of the widely differing forms that contemporary music takes.

3. To make CONTACT between the large number of organisations and individuals interested in music in the Birmingham area and to make them aware of others working to the same ends (This, while hoping that most of the articles in the magazine will also have a wider appeal).

4. To bring to everyone's attention the extremely varied nature, of the present-day musical scene, remembering that all its manifestations are the music of today, written for the people of today - and thus deserving our attention.

We hope to publish an issue of the magazine once every academic term (i.e. about every four months). To do this we obviously need support - and this includes articles written by the readers of this first issue i.e. you ! Anything on any aspect of twentieth century music will be considered. Contributions on the most recent developments will be particularly welcome.

In the present issue we have articles on pop, jazz and "serious" music. We apologise for the absence of anything on "folk"; nothing was forthcoming from those we asked, a situation that can only be rectified in future issues by those of our readers interested in folk music.

We would welcome any information on coming events and reviews of events recently past; also, any suggestions for improvements to the magazine and "letters to the editor" on views expressed in this and subsequent issues. We should point out, of course, that the views expressed in articles and reviews do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

KEITH POTTER CHRIS VILLARS

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THE MUSIC OF EDGARD VARÈSE

Edgard Varèse was one of the most original and perceptive composers of this century. In his music he never made any concessions to public taste, and its uncompromising character frequently shocked concert audiences into hostile reactions. Throughout his life controversy surrounded his work. In 1929 the first performance in Paris of 'AMERIQUES' provoked a riot only comparable to that of the first performance of 'THE RITE OF SPRING'. Even the music he composed in his later years audiences found difficult to understand, and another hostile demonstration took place at the world premiere of DÉSERTS in 1954. The desire to explore new means of expression rather than use those that might become hardened into tradition is a basic feature of his character. Varèse remained an avant-garde figure all his life.

From an early age he recognised the need to overthrow those existing conventions which limited a composer's imagination rather than encouraged it. He foresaw the possibility of developing electronic devices to the point at which they could be of use in the composition of music.

'Our musical alphabet must be enriched. We also need new instruments very badly ..... Musicians should take up this question in deep earnest with the help of machinery specialists ..... What I am looking for are new technical mediums which can lend themselves to every expression of thought and can keep up with thought'.

These comments were published in the New York Telegraph in March 1916, thirty years before the tape recorder became available. One particular phrase in that interview sums up his whole attitude to composition :

'I refuse to submit myself only to sounds that have already been heard'.

For many years Varèse experimented, but without sufficient resources or technical knowledge he was unable to achieve anything. Applications for a GUGGENHEIM Fellowship to enable him to carry out the work he wanted, were rejected. The Bell Telephone Company were equally uninterested in him.

Though thwarted in the practical expression of his ideas on this kind of music because of the lack of sufficient technical advances in this field, Varèse still devoted a great deal of thought to the kind of music he could write using an instrument capable of producing any pitch and any timbre. Both HYPERPRISM and INTEGRALES can be seen as instrumental studies in the techniques of electronic composition.

Varèse had considered the possibilities of composing with electronic techniques for thirty years before the tape recorder was finally developed during the Second World War. When, at last, it became available he was the composer best prepared aesthetically to use the new medium. He had waited a long time for this chance.

All other composers were taken rather by surprise. Their early electronic works show themselves completely overwhelmed by the immense resources suddenly available. They were unprepared to use them. Varèse, however, knew exactly what he wanted to write. His electronic works DÉSERTS, and LE POEME ÉLECTRONIQUE, are the first pieces to use the new medium successfully and effectively in music of lasting quality. Varèse's works are the first to establish electronic techniques as being as equally powerful as any other means of expression open to a composer. They have a conviction much other electronic music of that period lacks, a conviction resulting from thirty years of frustrated silence suddenly being released.

Varèse could never accept domination of any kind, either personally from an individual, or artistically by composing music according to any system. This dislike of authority was partly conditioned by an unhappy childhood. His father wished his son to be an engineer like himself and Varèse was forbidden to study music and shut up in his room for many hours a day to work on scientific subjects. The relationship between his parents was not a particularly happy one. Shortly after he was born Varèse had to be sent to live with his grandparents in the country, and later in his childhood he had to witness the frequent violence of his father towards his mother. After the death of his wife Varèse's father married again. This second marriage was no happier than the first. During one quarrel Varèse intervened and fought with his father. Much of Varèse's opposition to authority whether personal or artistic arose from this home background. In 1903, at the age of twenty Varèse left his home in Turin for good and fled to Paris, the city of his birth.

In Paris Varèse studied for a short time at both the Schola Cantorum and the Conservatoire, but he was already temperamentally unsuited to being a student. He met Debussy who was much impressed with his music and encourgaged him :

'You have a right to compose what you want to, the way you want to if the music comes out and is your own. Your music comes out and is yours'. (F.M. Listener's Guide, November 1962).

From 1907 to 1913 Varèse spent most of his time in Berlin where he met and studied with Busoni. Busoni's book 'Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music' contained many phrases to which Varèse responded. Such comments as 'The function of the creative artist consists in making laws, and not following laws already made' and 'Music is born free; and to win freedom is its destiny' helped Varèse clarify his own artistic beliefs.

All of Varèse's music composed in this period has been destroyed. In 1914, just as Varèse was embarking on a conducting tour, war was declared and he was forced to return to France to join the Army. In 1915 after being invalided out of the Army, suffering from double pneumonia, Varèse decided to spend the rest of the war in the United States of America. On December 29th, 1915 Varèse arrived in New York for what he felt was a short stay, but in fact apart from some years spent travelling abroad he remained in the U.S.A. for the rest of his life.

Varèse is one of the first composers to respond to the challenge posed by the industrial society that came into existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He responded so well to this new urban environment that eventually he felt more at home in the big cities of Turin, Paris and Berlin than in the country where he had spent his early childhood. Consequently when he arrived in New York, he felt completely at ease there.

Varèse found America stimulating his aural imagination. He wandered along the busy streets and through the factories listening to the new sounds man was creating. To him they were all part of man's experience. He began to use these new, harsher, more stringent sonorities in his music. He deliberately searched for timbres that would reflect the new age of steel and concrete, that would relate his output as a composer to the new industrial society in which the majority of the population were now living.

His musical language became both highly original, because no composers (apart from the Futurists in Italy) had explored these sounds before, and relevant to mankind's new experience. Inevitably those for whom music was merely an escapist entertainment were shocked and outraged by this new language. Even they, however, could recognise the source of his inspiration.

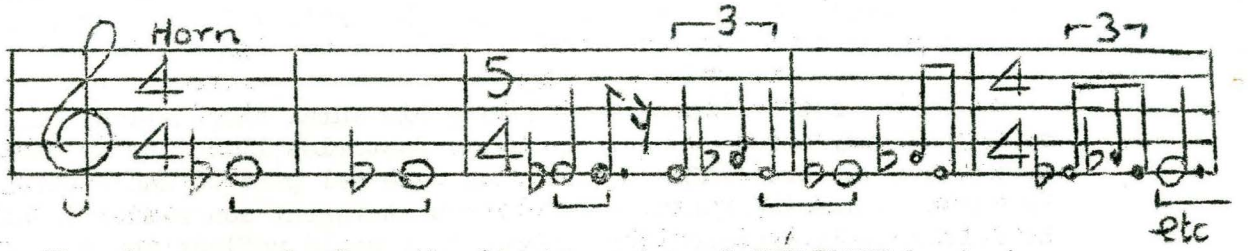
'A trolley car gong, an automobile horn and the rush of gutter water down an open manhole, blended into a sweet pure chord as we fled by. Varèse's Hyperprism was still pursuing us'. (From a review of Hyperprism, quoted, without acknowledgment, from an American newspaper, in 'Shocks for the Mus. Docs' by 'Divertimento' in the Nottingham Journal and Express, 20th June, 1924).

The music Varèse produced during the period from 1918 to 1936 falls into two main categories. Two large scale works, AMÉRIQUES and ARCANA are for full orchestras. A number of works, OFFRANDES, HYPERPRISM, OCTANDRE, INTÉGRALES, IONISATION and EQUATORIAL are for chamber ensembles. There is also a short piece for solo flute, DENSITY 21.5.

All these works use a similar style. The emphasis on hard instrumental timbres, favours the use of wind and brass rather than strings, particularly in those works for chamber ensembles. Percussion textures were expanded and developed until they became equal in status with the other sections of the orchestra. Indeed in HYPERPRISM percussion sounds tend to overwhelm the pitched instruments of the ensemble. This trend culminated in the first work in the history of music for percussion alone, IONISATION. Varèse is the composer most responsible for expanding the sonorities of the orchestra by developing its percussion section.

With this interest in percussion timbres is combined a very sophisticated rhythmic style. Varèse does not use exact repetitions of rhythmic patterns but adopts a more subtle style of continuous variation of them. Quite frequently he relies solely on rhythm to create the melodic impetus of the work. Passages like those in the second movement at figure five and in the third movement at figure two of Octandre, where harmony and melody remain static, depend entirely on rhythm for their forward movement.

Harmony and melody are very closely related in Varèse's music. The pitches of the melodic line are always of importance in determining the harmonic structure. For that reason Varèse's melody tends to use either one, two or three principle pitches (sometimes with 'grace' notes added) in its construction.



The above example from the first version of AMERIQUES beginning one bar before Fig. 12, opposes two pitches, E flat and F flat. The line develops further by opposing the E flat to an A natural. The tension in the melodic line is carefully controlled by the rhythmic values. By changing these slightly Varèse can create either an increase or relaxation in tension. This accounts for the non-repetitive rhythmic style.

Varèse's harmonic language is very broad because his chords conform to no single easily definable method of construction. In his chord-building he rejected any system such as tonality, serial technique, or polytonality, preferring instead to retain complete control over the individual situation, being more aware of how the note :

> "will 'sound' in the orchestral fabric , than .....
> in just what position the note occupies in the harmony"
> (Henry Cowell, The Music of Edgar (q.v.) Varèse.
> Modern Music 1928).

As a result his harmonic style is one of the most varied of all 20th century composers, using almost every possible combination of intervals available to him.

In the years between 1936 and 1949, Varèse finished little. He still continued composing but generally destroyed what he had written. The invention of the tape recorder, however, gave him fresh incentive to complete a work and he produced two important pieces for this medium, DESERTS and LE POÈME ÉLECTRONIQUE.

DÉSERTS, his third large scale work, was composed for orchestra and three interpolations of taped sound. The result is not an unintegrated sequence of ideas, but a carefully planned progression of thought, in which the electronic and instrumental sections complement and reinforce the purpose of each other. Both sections are in fact remarkably similar in character. The link between the two is partially provided by the sounds of the percussion ensemble, which also occur during the three interpolations. DÉSERTS, the kind of music that Varèse had for so long wanted to write, contains a savage authority and purpose in its use of material, which is not found in the more diletante explorations of electronic music undertaken by Schaeffer, Henry, and Stockhausen.

L Poème Electronique is purely an electronic work. It was composed in 1958 for the Philips pavilion at the Brussels World Fair. It draws on a wide range of material for its sound resources, from a fragment of classical music, an organ, the voice, through percussion sounds to noise. It is not, however, a haphazard collection of events, but a piece containing a perfectly satisfactory progression of thought.

The remaining years of Varèse's life are a story of unsuccessful attempts to complete works, unselfish assistance to young composers who came to New York to study with him, and of the gradual acceptance of his music by the concert public. He died in New York on November 6th, 1965, at the age of eighty-two. Of all the many tributes paid to him, one from Anais Nin was particularly apt :

> "If light travels faster than sound, in the case of Varèse, sound travelled much faster."

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L I S T O F W O R K S

NOTE. Some dates of composition are uncertain. Varèse himself took little interest in these matters. Any information he did provide was not always accurate.

Date		First Performed	
1905	Trois pièces, (for orchestra) (1)	-	
1905	La Chanson des jeunes hommes (1)	-	
1905	Souvenir (1)	-	
1905	Le Prélude à la fin d'un jour (for large orchestra) (2)	-	
1906	Rhapsodie romance (3)	-	
1908	Bourgogne (for large orchestra) (3)	Berlin	15.12.1910
1909	Gargantua (for orchestra) (3) (4)	-	
1912	Les Cycles du Nord (Opera) (3)	-	
1908-14	Oedipus und die Sphynx (Opera) (3) (4)	-	
1920-21	Ameriques (for large orchestra) Revised 1929 Further revised c. 1959	Philadelphia	9. 4.1926
1921	Offrandes (for soprano and chamber orchestra)	New York	23. 4.1922
1922-23	Hyperprism (for small orchestra)	New York	4. 3.1923
1923	Octandre (for chamber ensemble)	New York	13. 1.1924
1923-25	Intégrales (for small orchestra)	New York	1. 3.1925
1926-27	Arcana (for large orchestra)	Philadelphia	8. 4.1927
1931	Ionisation (for percussion ensemble)	New York	6. 3.1933
1934	Ecvatorial (for choir, small orchestra)	New York	24. 4.1934
1936	Densité 21.5. (for solo flute)	New York	16. 2.1936
1947	Etude for Espace (for choir, two pianos, percussion) (5)	New York	23. 2.1947

Date.		First Performed	
1950-54	Déserts (for orchestra, three electronic interpolations)	Paris	2.12.1954
1955	La Procession de Verges (electronic sounds for film music) (5)	-	-
1958	Le Poème Électronique (electronic sounds on tape)	Brussels	May to Oct.1958
1961	Nocturnal (for soprano, choir and orchestra (6)	New York	1. 5.1961
1965	Nuit (for soprano, chamber orchestra) (4) (5)	-	-

(1) Probably destroyed by Varèse.

(2) Lost.

(3) Destroyed in a warehouse fire in Berlin 1918.

(4) Unfinished.

(5) At the present time unavailable.

(6) Finished version prepared by Chou Wen Chung.

DAVID H. COX

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IMPROVISED IMPRESSIONS

I should like to make a short critical survey of a few current singles which I consider to be of better than average quality.

First, George Harrison's 'My Sweet Lord' which is still retaining immense popularity, the reason not being hard to understand. This particular track was 'lifted' from his 'All Things Must Pass' L.P. which contains at least two songs which I maintain are even better than 'My Sweet Lord'. No doubt the material tag of 'commercial appeal' has dictated the choice, one with which I do not propose to criticise.

The song is marked by its spiritualism and is strongly reminiscent both in style and arrangement of the EDWIN HAWKINS' SINGERS 'Oh, Happy Day', but there the similarity ends. The whole song is underlined by some quite distinctive guitar work which just suits the mood as well as providing a solid tempo. Beginning with some syncopated rhythm guitar, with just a

suggestion of horn, the song builds towards a nice change of key which is not immediately obvious on first hearing but which serves to divide the recording into two separate parts. The first part is much more natural, with only the guitar and girl chorus providing backing, whilst the second part tends to be rather more artificial and commercial, with the introduction of bass and percussion, the latter merely resulting in destroying all vestige of syncopated rhythm. We witness a clever interchange, though between the Hallelujah chorus of the first part, and the now all too familiar 'Hare Krishna' chant of the second, with the two again interchanging before the inevitable fade-out takes the repetitions final chorus into oblivion. I do wish more writers and artists would try to end their records on a convincing note, certainly a writer of Harrison's ability should be capable of devising a more impressive ending. Nonetheless, it is still a very fine record.

Recently, ELTON JOHN has begun to receive a lot more recognition, which has long been overdue. His 'Your Song' which was lately in the U.S. top ten is also taken from an L.P. and is one which I never grow tired of singing. As principally a composer and performer, his careful choice of chords to elicit the appropriate degree of emotion, his distinctive piano style and clever use of voice, are all very much in evidence. Although most of his songs tend to be Blues and Rock orientated, yet I feel that his best efforts seem to be reserved for simple love songs, which this is.

Not having previously heard STEPHEN STILLS perform solo, I must admit that his 'Love the One You're With' took me somewhat by surprise. Gone were the high-pitched, tight harmonies of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, but in its place is a quite infectious, earthy sound of contrasting arrangement. There is some wild organ and 'gutsy' vocal from Stills, a solid chorus backing, (these girl choruses seem to be the 'in' thing nowadays) and some nice guitar and percussion, with a strange absence of bass. The song appears tomhave been built around a play on the words of the title and although I cannot personally agree with what is advocated, the song tends to grow on one.

It has been a strong point of contention to me whether there has been any substantial musical progression by Creedence Clearwater Revival over the past two years, but listening to their 'Have You Ever Seen the Rain' single, I do not really care if they stagnate so long as they continue to release recordings with such uninhibited excitement and co-ordinated mobility. It might be claimed with some justification that C.C.R. owe much to the creative talents of John Fogerty, but for my money, they are a synthesised partnership of four musicians each uniquely indispensable, each contributing their own special brand of modern rock 'n' roll. The relative failure of other artists to effectively 'cover' C.C.R. hits, notably, 'Proud Mary', only serves to emphasise their ability to produce such a closely-knit, vigorous sound over and above the sum total of the individual contributions. On this recording, rhythm guitar, drums and 'solo' bass together form a co-ordinated backdrop for John Fogerty's frantic and earthy vocal. The gradual introduction of organ highlights the presentation and intensifies the emotive element. A simple ending (not faded) concludes a song both technically and harmonically simple, and yet one which hever fails to excite and impress me.

DOUGLAS NELSON

THE MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF POP

For several reasons it's difficult for a musician to talk or write about pop. Firstly, prejudice - prejudice against, from fellow musicians, and prejudice for (and therefore against all other musics and musicians) from pop fans. Both tend to cut off pop and discourage consideration of the music. "Academic" analysis is sneered at from both sides. Secondly, the old bogey, commercialism, and what must (without prejudice) be recognised as the undoubted triviality which often results from it. This is not so much an objective difficulty as an emotional block. The tendency is to say "ugh" and switch off one's ears. Thirdly, there is the incontrovertible fact that pop is more than just music; it is an integral part of a whole cultural package. To conventionally trained musicians, used to the purity, the abstractness, the 'out-of-time-ness' of 'art-music', this is an unfamiliar phenomenon. We often don't know exactly what we're talking about, nor what terms to use.

All three difficulties, considered as objections to musical discussion, can be easily rebutted. Prejudice, as elsewhere, is to be overcome. Triviality - well, triviality in music, as many Ph.D.'s bear witness, is not necessarily a barrier to analysis. Commercialism simply necessitates of the intrepid student rather more fortitude than usual. Extra-musical complications - perhaps the most difficult problem - mean merely that the musician, following the lead of the ethno-musicologist, must enlist the aid of sociology, psychology and anthropology, and emerge from his splended isolation (it may be that pop and jazz, once better accepted as subjects for musical discussion, will be the strongest single spur to the acceptance of ethno-musicology in our musical studies).

But it is not merely that the objections to discussion of the musical significance of pop can be refuted. There are also more positive reasons for recommending consideration. First, pop, like Everest and the moon, is there. Until the metamorphosis of the musician into an ostrich is completed, there seems no reason to neglect what is staring us in the ears. Moreover, the speed of development and transmission of music today necessitates and makes it possible that we react more quickly than before; we need in music a non-journalistic 'modern history'. Second, pop, despite commercialism, has resulted in a considerable amount of exciting music. He who has ears to hear ... Third, pop is an extremely useful tool for the study of other modern musics, the entire modern musical situation and even contemporary culture as a whole. And if one vital purpose of listening to and studying music is not an increased knowledge of the condition of man, then my desire to participate in it is at an end.

In case the gulf between, say the Rolling Stones and Pierre Boulez seems too great for my last point to be taken seriously, let me try to explain what I mean by it. First of all, it is inconceivable that in our kind of world different musics could coexist without good reason - without relationship. We are all too much part of one another for that. Secondly, it is true to say that pop has direct intellectual roots in 'art', (the American Beat and Hipster traditions particularly). Thirdly, many of the musical sources of pop - American Negro music, American and British Folk music, for instance - have also helped to produce modern American and British 'art-music'. But much more important than these superficialities is what I'll call cultural stance. This is

usually hidden by surface characteristics. To identify it, to separate the wood from the trees, one needs a cross-cultural perspective. We are just beginning to acquire this. By cultural stance I mean basic cultural perspective, basic world-view, if you like. In music this means looking beyond superficial stylistic characteristics and changes to primary techniques and their implications. Consider the retreat, in twentieth century 'serious' music, from major-minor tonality, from harmony, from 'pure' tone and traditional difinitions of the music/noise distinction; consider the advent of new structural techniques: ostinato, melodic extension and variation, rhythmic pattern, college; consider the resurrection of old modes and the development of new melodic principles equally committed to purely melodic meaning and against harmonic implications; consider the complexifying of rhythm; consider the retreat from notation and the rebirth of improvisation; consider the abandonment of the orchestra for the chamber group. Now, ask yourself whether all these developments though they manifest themselves in different ways, are not also characteristic of pop. Analysis on this level (the level of macro-technique, as it might be called) has hardly begun; but perhaps you can see what I mean. The technique can also show us differences as well as connections, of course. For example, pop is obviously a ritualistic activity rather than a pure music. It works through myth (though the import of the myth is not easily verbalised), induces quasi-liturgical participation and has meanings and effects not immediately perceptible from sounds alone. In contrast, 'serious' music of this century, though often ritualistic in feeling and, perhaps, intent, lacks the ritualistic situation. It is a religion with a priestly elite but little participatory congregation. Most differences of this kind can, like this one, be accounted for by differences in history, function or sociological situation.

The most important musical influence on pop is, I think, the blues. This is interesting because the blues were formed, of course, from a mixture of European and African sources, and if one examines the development of 'serious' twentieth century music, one finds that it is precisely in the tempering of traditional European techniques by techniques more typical of non-Western cultures (non-tonal modes, rhythmic complexity, variation and repetition forms, improvisation, contrapuntal, polyrhythmic or heterophonic textures rather than harmony, etc.) that a great deal of this development lies. From this point of view (that is, the point of view of cultural stance) blues (and its relative, jazz) can be regarded as the archetypal music of our century. And so pop's position in this tree of relationships becomes clear. Pop has adapted the stance of the blues from one suitable to the racial alienation of the American Negro to one suitable to the generational alienation of the white, Western teenager. The cultural schizophrenia and cultural synthesis characteristic of the blues, together with many of the techniques associated with these, remain. My point is that they constitute a motif which permeates our culture. Whether one ascribes this to the impact of tribalising electronic media on print culture (McLuhan), or to the development of "historical consciousness" into "psychoanalytical consciousness" (Norman Brown), or to the return of Caliban after his too-ferocious-repression by Prospero (Wilfrid Mellers), or to the convergence of formerly disparate cultures to form the one "global Village", "spaceship earth" (Buckminster Fuller), or to a complex mixture of these and other influences, is immaterial. The result is clear. Certainly 'straight' modern music, as it has developed

pop, jazz, the folk revival and the emergence in the West of non-Western musics, such as that of India, are part of a coherent pattern. The American Negro is at once a symptom and a manifestation of this. Hence his formative role in Western popular culture throughout the last half century - culminating in pop.

Pop itself has a history, of course; and one which can be seen in terms of its cultural stance. The most important phases in 'historical pop' (Rock 'n' Roll, Liverpool Beat, Rhythm 'n' Blues, Soul) are not arbitrarily juxtaposed but related - to some extent sequentially. And the pattern which these relationships denote can be understood in terms of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' (a tendency to veer away from or towards Europe). Rock 'n' Roll set the pattern off, dropping a bomb on the Western value-system, making possible and necessitating the formation of a subversive subculture. Beat (and its American contemporaries, Dylanesque folk-rock and West Coast surfing pop) 'whitened' rock 'n' roll, contributing creatively from the white side and establishing pop as a distinct musical phenomenon. British R & B, returning to the blues, carried us away from Europe once again, until Soul absorbed its stance into a more sophisticated style, whose mainstream-feel repeats that of Beat at a 'blacker' cultural level. Rock 'n' Roll and R & B are radical and ground-breaking; Beat and Soul are consolidatory and secure. The musical connections between the partners in each pair make the point. But they should not obscure the other important point about this pattern: the overall move towards the primitive (made clear, for example, by a comparison of Rock 'n' Roll and R & B and the blues styles from which they derive). The historical development seems to have had the purpose of carrying pop, by a repeated thrust-relax process, to the 'right' cultural stance for today's cultural situation.

In the course of doing this it also witnessed an increasing maturity and variety of technique, as a tradition was established, as musicians and fans aged, and as different generations emerged. Pop development became ever less linear and ever more spherical - until with Soul (that is, the peak of popularity of Soul - about four or five years ago) its history came to an end. What we have now is a new mainstream (just as jazz and revolutionary 'serious' modern music began as rebellion, eccentricity or exoticism and quickly became mainstreams). Revolt has become style, as George Melly says (though revolt is still implicit in the style). Now anything goes. The result is a pluralism as impressive and healthy as that of 'straight' music at the moment, and one very typical of our world.

One characteristic of this pluralism now is a breaking down of barriers and a confusion of labels. Given pop's achievement of autonomy, identity and self-confidence, this was probably inevitable. The rock-jazz of Nucleus and Miles Davis on the one hand and Blood Sweat and Tears and Chicago on the other; the 'electric folk' of Fairport Convention et al.; the Who's 'rock opera', Tommy; the 'free pop' of the Pink Floyd and the Soft Machine, in which the influence of 'free-form' New Wave jazz and the 'straight' Avant Garde mingles with pop-derived vitality : all, like similar hybrids in other areas (e.g. Indo-Jazz Fusions, Ravi Shankar's East-West explorations, the

Third Stream, African 'high life' music, etc.), merely acknowledge the relationships which were pointed out above (as well as mutating the differences). And they are becoming more consciously acknowledged; instinct is becoming theory and practice. Already musicians trained in and conversant with various different musics are emerging. It will certainly not be long before we have but one Avant Garde, in which labels are irrelevant and sources - Cage, Coleman, the Soft Machine - mingle excitingly. And eventually musical differences may be a matter for taste and musical function rather than training, history and prejudice. A change in consciousness of the dimensions involved could not for ever confine itself to elites (hence pop); nor can it always dismember itself in the interests of class and artistic apartheid. Pop is here; the melting-pot is only just beginning to simmer.

RICHARD MIDDLETON

* * * * * * * * * *

THE FORMALISATION OF JAZZ

The latter half of the nineteen fifties saw the rise of a new development in jazz; musicians weaned in the idiom of bebop under the inspired wing of Charlie Parker, like John Coltrane, Archie Shepp and Ornette Coleman, set up the frontiers of avant garde jazz. Theirs was a stunning move at the time; a complete break with the chordal structure of bebop and mainstream into the limitless area of music unrestricted by key or chord progression.

This avant garde movement began nearly twenty years ago and since then has seen practically no development. We still refer to the avant garde as if it were still something new and revolutionary, though the remarkable exploitations by the, now dead, Coltrane are already accepted into the pages of the few recent jazz "histories". It is as if the atonal free form concept of the avant garde allowed everything to be said in the first instance and was thus a complete non sequitur in terms of direct development.

With the avant garde presenting a deadlock to any insight into the future direction of jazz, one must return to bebop as the possible key to the problem. The jazz we hear today seems to be either a hangover from bebop or else, with the avant garde, a complete reaction against it. Bebop is the final and most perfect result of a mode of music which was from its very beginning perfectly stylised in its form. The whole of jazz up to bebop, and partly after it can be traced back to the simple and rigid structure of the three chord, twelve bar blues. With this an infinite variety of numbers can be constructed simply by changing the time, melody and individual players over a basic structure that remains unchanged. Whatever particular historical style of jazz one chooses whether "trad", "classical", "mainstream" or "bigband" there is very little change in the basic structure, except that as time went on the chord progressions became

slightly more complex and the use of rhythm more subtle. Thus within each style everything is predictable; a melody is played around a partiular chord progression in which the key note occupies an obvious place, solos follow from members of the band individually and to end up there is a restatement of the melody. The whole history of jazz up to the avant gardists is one of a rigidly formalised idiom.

Bebop came as a surprise. It seemed at the time to be a revolutionary step in the development of jazz. In fact it did no more than develop in a single move what would have happened anyway given the natural slow course of innovation in any creative art. Charlie Parker and his compatriots stretched the limits of the formalised chord progressions and time patterns to their logical breaking point. They also introduced an artistically sophisticated move. Bebop, as firstly formulated, was intended to give the musicians freedom to play to, rather than with, their audience. The players of the time, performing mostly in night clubs in New York and the other jazz meccas of America, were annoyed at amateurs from the dance floor sitting in with the band on numbers of their own request. That anyone could sit in with any band speaks clearly of the rut of stylisation that jazz existed in. The music itself had no individuality from one band to the next; variation lay entirely in the hands of the soloists. But bebop did not change this; audiences were stunned for a while at the complexity of the music, but then it became merely a matter of time before the crowd caught up, learnt the numbers, and could again join in. The basic formula for a jazz number remained unchanged. Bebop has a distinctly jagged jumpy sound. It is compact and uncompromising. The soloists problem of following and interpreting the chords is a very taxing one.

The all important aspect of any form of jazz is that it ultimately relies for its value as living music on the individual interpretation of the soloist and his ability to "swing" or "play with soul". In this respect Charlie Parker is justifiably one of the godheads of jazz. He alone has so far been able to do justice to the complexity of bebop. With a unique feeling for the music and an extraordinary technique he was able to play bebop as it demands to be played; fast, soaring and intricate with all possible "swing". Technically his compatriots were always bogged down too much by the chord structure to play at the speed required.

That there will only be one Charlie Parker signifies the end of bebop and consequently the end of the whole concept of jazz formalised into a series of chord progressions. The question still remains as to whether anything from the avant garde provides comprehensible paths for renewed development and a chance for faith in jazz as a valid living musical form.

It is a prevalent view that jazz is like pop music in that it is open to anyone with any musical ability. Yet jazz relies entirely on the soloist; unless he has something more than merely a good technique and a musical ear the result is only mediocre jazz. Improvisation requires the spirit of creativity as much as any other work of art. John Coltrane developed a style of free form jazz of a unique sincere quality that has aroused the admiration of people with an equal respect for Charlie Parker or Lester Young. The fact that avant garde jazz appears to be nothing more than a directionless reaction against bebop and all formalisation is important if one sees jazz

as directed not by the idiom but by the style and feeling for individual interpretation by single players. Thus, since jazz is perhaps not just a meaningless concept, there is hope that it will continue to develop, though slowly, through the varying qualities of single unique improvisers.

PAUL MEDLEY

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MANIFESTO

Much of the new music is concerned with performance under the direction of the composer, who trains and directs his players. Cage, Stockhausen and Cardew have worked in this way, developing a skilled and dedicated group of players, to achieve the kind of performances they want. Cage early became associated with the pianist David Tudor and dancers such as Merce Cunningham; Stockhausen has increasingly worked with his own group; and Cardew is primarily interested in performing groups through his own work in AMM and more recently the Scratch Orchestra. The activities of an English group such as Intermodulation are an important outlet for Roger Smalley and Tim Souster, two composer-performers.

There is much to be learnt from exploratory work, playing from graphic or verbal notations as well as more conventional indeterminate pieces such as Cardew's "Octet 61". Musicians are more likely to find out about this new performance tradition if they participate themselves rather than merely listen to groups which may not be highly skilled. Skill and musicianship do matter particularly when the composer has specified very few notes. (When is a composer not a composer ? All I can say is that the identity of indeterminate pieces makes itself felt for the players even if the indications are so free that the composer would not recognise his piece if he came into the room.) Discipline is not merely a technical matter - ensemble, scales and arpeggios arduously practised. Stockhausen in "Aus den sieben Tagen" points out the spiritual demands made of his players in every kind of musical decision, even though no note is actually named in the score. Responsibility is extended, a sound once produced affects the time which follows. Playing is a means of increasing awareness in all kinds of music - it is not mere improvisation.

The formatuon of a performing group based on the music department at Birmingham University is to be welcomed. It will aid realistic discussion of the ideas surrounding avant garde music today. And it will do this far more successfully than a visit from outsiders who disappear after the concert before any awkward questions can be asked. The first meetings of the group upset equilibrium at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, but when it was explained that the activity aspired to the condition of music, all was well. I hope the group will act as a forum in the University for the performing traditions of the avant garde, - recent but clearly recognisable and essential to the understanding of music today.

PETER DICKINSON

INTERVIEW WITH JUSTIN CONNOLLY

On 5th February Justin Connolly came to Birmingham for the first performance of his new work "Triad V". The following interview between him and the editors of this magazine took place on that occasion.

Could you tell us something about your musical background?

I studied law first before I studied music and I went to the Royal College of Music, where I was a student of Peter Fricker. I also studied piano with Lamar Crowson and conducting with Sir Adrian Boult. Then I was lucky enough to get the Harkness Fellowship and I went to study in the United States with Mell Powell, who was formerly a distinguished jazz pianist and also a pupil of Paul Hindemith. He was a very fine musician who did a great deal for me and helped me tremendously with composition. Then I was asked to teach at Yale and taught there for about 18 months. I returned to England in 1967 and started teaching at the Royal College of Music, where I've been ever since.

What would you say were the major influences on your music ?

I've always been interested in a very wide range of music of all periods. I couldn't really say I was more influenced by one kind of music than another except, of course, that naturally one gravitates towards classical models. For me, that means Mozart and Schubert more than Beethoven. I don't quite know why. That doesn't mean I don't approve of Beethoven or think him a great composer, but he hasn't done as much for me as the other two have. Perhaps these influences do show, in fact, one of my pupils once told me that my music sounds curiously classical.

What about the various traditions in the twentieth century ?

Of course, Stravinsky and Schoenberg are tremendously important to me. Among less well known figures Elliot Carter has been particularly influential. I've always been absolutely fascinated by his idea of the connection between performance by the players and the kind of thing that is invented to play. For example, consider Webern's music. Nobody could claim that it is really the music of performance. It doesn't react upon the player in that kind of way. Carter's music, although it's very complex, has a great sense of the drama of actually playing instruments. This is a very important thing to me.

Is this something you try to do in your own music ?

Yes, very much so. I think this is a prime thing, this involvement with the notion of performance. I'm fairly active as a conductor and am very fascinated by the particular difficulty players have in coming to terms with what I've written. Also, I'm sure what I've written is itself suggested by what I imagine takes place when somebody does something on an instrument. Ever since I first started writing music,

I've been very keenly concerned with what it was like to play. Of course, there's a whole class of different but nevertheless very fine composers, like Tippett or Webern, whose music is always hard to play and doesn't give any evidence of having been specifically composed for the instruments.

Has your technique of composition changed very much over the years ?

I think it's changed a lot. When I was a student I was very interested in twelve note music and the classical twelve note procedures of the Schoenberg tradition. But I moved away from that slightly when I went to America and was exposed to things with a different kind of emphasis on them. My music is looser in organisation than that of the great German tradition but if I was asked whether I followed the German or the French traditions I'd certainly say, the German, because their juxtaposition of very intense feeling and a certain intellectual rigour at the same time is something that appeals to me.

What connection do you feel you have with other contemporary British composers ?

Of course, being about the same age as Maxwell-Davies and Harrison Birtwistle I belong to their generation. But, since I was already twenty-five when I started composing and was therefore 10 years behind my contemporaries, I also have a link with the younger generation of composers, like Roger Smalley, who were my immediate contemporaries at college.

Do you actually use serial technique in your compositions ?

My pieces are certainly very much affected by serial procedures, especially in the sense of the equation of harmonic with melodic elements; the unity of musical space which Schoenberg spoke about. But there are also lots of tonal things in my pieces of which I'm not a bit ashamed ! Indeed I think they constitute a virtue. It's rather difficult to import tonal references into a non-tonal situation without it being incongruous, so that if I can make somebody hear the chord of E flat major, but not quite recognise it as such, this is a triumph for me. I've made them hear that chord in a new guise, which, considering how old the chord of E flat major is, is no small achievement. In general, I don't think twelve note music is better than tonal music or that tonal music is better than twelve note music. I think there's a place for most kinds of mixture. It seems to me that the artist has to discover for himself what the mixture is for him. So far as my rather short past history of completed pieces is concerned I think I'd say I was an eclectic. I'm more interested in communication than in the purity of whatever kind of system I've used. For me, it's what the music says that's important and, to this end, I find that I need to grasp a whole number of traditions, classical as well as our own.

How important for you is electronic music ?

I'm very interested in electronic music. I've worked in the studio with Peter Zinovier who's been very helpful to me on the technical side and we've done one or two things that have worked reasonably well. I think it's another instrument and I'm very enthusiastic about it. But I think the future is obviously not going to be electronic music. It's going to be live music because people like to play and it's probably going to be live music with electronics.

You don't see any future in purely electronic music ?

Not really. Not unless we can get a lot more variety than is possible at present.

What about indeterminacy ? The music of Cage, for example ?

I've been very much loosened up by Cage. My piece, "Triad V", has certain limitedly aleatoric things in it. All my patterns are prescribed but are to be played in different orders which will make each performance slightly different. I think my only objection to indeterminacy is that I enjoy composing too much ! I'm very much interested in the traditional craft of composition and I don't like making it easy for myself. If I were to write a piece that depended entirely upon giving a bare instruction to the performers I'd feel I was not really carrying out what I see as my duty as a composer. But one can't be doctrinaire about what a composer is or isn't. John Cage is a very remarkable man whose ideas have been influential even with those people who are not very sympathetic to his music. He has changed the face of music. One may not like its new face all that much but one must admit that it does have a certain strength and a certain importance.

Do you think we have a flourishing musical scene here in Britain today ?

Yes, I think so. I get performed a lot at the moment so obviously I think it's flourishing ! Actually, it seems to me that we have a large number of very good composers. It's certainly a very astonishing kind of thing for a country to have composers as completely different as Maxwell Davies, Birtwistle, Goeur, Roger Smalley and John Taverner. I think this is a very good thing.

What do you think of the suggestion that British composers today are merely following trends picked up from abroad ?

I think it is, and historically always has been, difficult for Britain to appear in any other than a following on kind of role. Whether you look at the development of historical institutions or any other aspect of society, Britain has rarely originated. It's not, basically, our character. As a result, we've tended to learn from other people and produce a very original synthesis. For instance, Elgar, a composer whom I greatly admire, could not exist without Dvorak or even Strauss and yet what he's produced is a "tertium quid", something quite different but which couldn't exist without the other two. In my own case I could mention the direct influence of somebody like Lutoslawski.

In his second symphony and string quartet he uses devices of writing out passages for people to play which have no fixed relation to one another but which always sound well whichever version is produced. As I've pointed out before, I've adopted this sort of limited aleatoric thing in my own music. (In fact, I pinched that idea from Lutoslawski! He knows about it. He doesn't seem to mind.) For myself, I think I'm not particularly an originator. I like to synthesize what I find around me in the world of music.

You don't think that music in Britain today is any less adventurous or experimental than it is abroad ?

No. I think we have a very vital musical scene. I don't think the corresponding composers of my generation in other countries do any better than ours in terms of interest in their music. I think we're on the up and up rather than the down and down. It may be that Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle are just outdated versions of Parry and Stanford, but I don't think so. I think they're doing something quite individual which has its own strength and value. Of course, English music is always in danger of being parochial. The difficulty is that the local scene always dominates, to the extent that friends of mine in America who've heard pieces by Birtwistle have found them incomprehensible. But the people over here have heard pieces by American omposers and found them equally incomprehensible. I find this rather saddening because I really think we're basically very similar.

What do you think of the way music is run in this country ? Do you approve of the Arts Council, for example ?

Knowing English institutions, I'm sure we make a complete muddle and that things could be much better. But I think that a radical re-construction of the system wouldn't really be much good.

Do you think that a Ministry of Culture would create a worse situation than at present ?

Yes, I think it would. The thing about the present situation is that if you want to do something, and it's got something, sooner or later somebody will take it up. Now in other countries this is definitely not true. If I wanted to write the kind of music I do in Russia or Spain, for example, I wouldn't be allowed to do it, though in Spain it may be a little easier. Here, we could easily slip back into that situation, and be having cultural policemen and all that kind of thing.

How difficult did you find it to get your own works performed ?

3 years ago was really the first time that I started to get played at all and now I get played quite a lot. It may all fade out tomorrow, so I'm not optimistic about the future. It's a very chancy business. There's no doubt that it depends a lot on who you know. I aim to be played because I like to communicate with people. I've no interest

whatever in composition as an abstract thing. So if it's necessary to engage in political manoevering in order to get played I'll do that too. I don't think this is anything to be ashamed of. This is the way life is organised.

Have many of your performances been outside London ?

No, they've been mostly in London. In fact it's a very rare thing for me to be played anywhere else than in London. I think this is one of the worst things about the organisation of music in our country, the fact that everything gets centralised. Of course, the BBC is the best outlet in terms of the size of audience. It's very nice to think that, even if a lot of people may turn off half way through, at any rate there's a potential audience much larger than you could get in any concert hall.

What are your plans for the future ?

I'd like to write more large works. Most of my music has been chamber music, though I have written several large orchestral works, two of which have been played. I have, also, several ideas for an opera. But this is a very big undertaking. I hope in a few years time I shall be able to do that. My works are gradually increasing in scope, size of resources etc. At the moment I'm writing a piece for the London Sinfonietta which is being performed on April 14th. It's a kind of concertante piece with 3 solo winds and a wind orchestra, violas and double basses.

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THE CLASSICAL INFLUENCE IN ROCK

It has become an accepted part of the trendy eclecticism of Rock for critics (especially those who wish to establish its claim to the status of an art form) to see the influence of classical composers on Rock musicians and for the musicians themselves to employ the themes and techniques of European art music in their work. While it is impossible to deny that these influences exist, their positive contribution to Rock is open to dispute.

The only Rock musician who has consistently integrated classical elements into his style is Frank Zappa. In writing for the group "The Mothers of Invention", he employs classical themes and techniques in an irreverent and often obscene mélange of sound and music with the aim of attacking the conformist and repressive attitudes of contemporary American society - "the plastic people" and the "brain police". Zappa was writing "serious" music in his teens and, according to a recent spokesman for the

R.P.O., has produced serious music of a high quality. His attitude to this music, however, is as irreverent as his attitude to early rock 'n' roll, "highschool" pop, vaudeville, jazz and the other idioms which provide raw materials for his compositions.

Many other musicians, however, have used classical music not as an integrated element in their styles, but as a substitute for a genuine understanding of the Afro-American roots of Rock or as a mere surface colouring. English groups, sometimes culturally remote from the influences that moulded Rock, are particularly vulnerable to the first charge. In Jon Lord's "Concerto for Group and Orchestra", the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performs a dispirited pastiche of various styles of European art music while the group produces a gutless parody of Rock. The Nice in "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" produced possibly the most pretenticus music of the 1960's, in their self-conscious and incongruous use of Bach and Sibelius. The work of the Pink Floyd is a partial exception, but from the evidence of their latest LP "Atom Heart Mother" it seems that the delicate balance in their use of electronically produced sound between originality and pretension has been upset.

The influence of classical music on Rock, has in fact, been slight and mainly detrimental. Jazz and rock musicians, working within idioms and traditions whose formative influences are similar and making common responses to situations have had great mutual impact. Thus Dave Crosby's assimilation of Coltrane's music in 1967 was an organic and natural development of his own style. Any serious attempt to absorb classical music, on the other hand, is likely, on present evidence, to result in an emasculated pastiche or in a sophisticated intellectual exercise which negates the vital and creative musical intelligence which is the essence of Rock.

CHRIS MORAN

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A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

In an article for the new music journal "Soundings" Michael Tippett begins his 'Categories of Judgement in Modern Music' with an attempt at placing the term 'innovation' in some kind of perspective ....."In more stable artistic periods when the dangers of stagnation were so often in evidence the true innovation had generally to work itself through against a hostile establishment and a hostile criticism. In an extreme innovatory period like our own, innovation as such can even become a kind of establishment, and receive a constant critical accolade. "

Tippett does not really justify the implications of such phrases as .....stable artistic period.....dangers of stagnation.....innovation..... and these are open to discussion.

If we search for a stable artistic period, then we would probably arrive at the eighteenth century, its music, its painting and its architecture. The introduction of Renaissance features into architecture of the Tudor period was done quite slowly until we had an established, "stable" English Renaissance. After 1600 up to and including the death of Haydn, music had gradually absorbed new ideas until there was a "stable" classical period. Innovation was then unknown. The working out of lines and forms as an objective art allowed emotion as a secondary element, and here the word "stable" can, I think, be replaced by the word "complete". Perhaps a complete work of art is stagnant.

As soon as romantic ideas came in the visual arts and in music, we do see an unstabilized artistic period, probably greater in its lasting effects than the 1600 revolution. The uprooting of convention, the completely musical being replaced by the dramatic inner man, the search for novel effects in the visual arts (e.g. works by John Turner and John Nash) - all created disturbances which were to grow out of all recognition and give birth to the avant-garde....itself a logical conclusion from the age of Beethoven, Turner and William Blake.

The 'novel effects' throughout the Romantic period were often mistaken for innovation, when in actual fact they were merely questions, searchings, and experiments with new means of expression. All romantics have searched for a personal means of expression, and in searching, they have exposed their connections with the past and their relation to the present.

From Tippett's remarks, we might expect, in our own totally non-stable period, a virile, non-stagnant art. He regards innovation as something to be got rid of as soon as possible, in order to concentrate on more serious matters, yet in taking this stand he doesn't connect stagnation and innovation. Many works of art today illustrate that just as completeness can lead to stagnation, so can the over-excitement and enthusiasm of the artist, mistakenly called innovation.

True innovation in our own period belongs to very few figures, Debussy and Stravinsky being the first; Impressionism and Cubism in the visual arts may be regarded as innovatory movements, yet both had their forerunners, and indeed Cubism can be seen to be an outcome of Impressionism. Such movements as De Stijl and Dadaism can be called innovatory, but in the overall picture, how important are these movements? They of course provide an essential link between one main source and another. Similarly how 'important' are composers such as Ravel, Milhaud, Hindemith, Dallapiccola, Britten and so on? This, of course, is absurd: it doesn't matter how 'important' a composer is. We are exposed in this progressive society (which way?) to the achievements of technologists and scientists, and we have come to expect constant newness in the arts, again mistakenly called innovation.

I think Michael Tippett's point, that our period is extremely innovatory, is misleading. Certain parts of society expect an enamelled stall every time they go out shopping, as it were, and this puts a great strain on the artist. Under this strain, he strives for newness or innovation, usually failing. A persistent search for innovation will, I feel, result in stagnation. True innovation does not exist today and if we look for this, then we must turn to composers of two previous periods in the twentieth century.

Debussy, Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Varese are the figures in the first period, and in the second we have Messiaen, John Cage and Stockhausen. All these artists were (and are) huge sources of energy and they revitalised conservative, eastablished trends. Artists following in their footsteps do not innovate at all, as Tippett would have us believe, but carry out ideas stemming from the main sources, creating new works of art conditioned by their own lives and experiences. Certainly the period of art after the Second World War is very unstable. The over-activity of today's artist is leading nowhere, not that it should, but as a result, I think that we are beginning to stagnate, just as society is in its desire for extremes.

On the other hand, the results of improvisation, and electronic music are very liberating indeed; but does this mean that these two forms are the only cure for stagnation? (This all depends on whether I am correct in seeing imminent stagnation). The possibilities opened up by the above forms are endless; improvisation (and to a certain extent electronic music), not unlike an operatic aria, crystallises in one set period of time an irreplaceable, unrepeatable moment. Surely the value of this could never involve a question of stagnation. The very immediacy of musical improvisation is surely necessary for a demanding audience, and the spontaneity of invention of a group of musical people is a priceless as a (notated) Haydn string quartet. Disease sets in when these liberating influences are treated in a dilletante manner with assumed innovation. The role of the artist in today's society can be rescued, I feel, if it is regarded with some respect for tradition. Even Stockhausen as much as admits this, and stagnation can be cured by forgetting innovation and developing a traditon liberated by the true innovators. When Tippett says that innovation can become establishment (tradition)....does he mean that the avant-garde is not a period of art but an approach to art?

JOHN CASKEN.

REVIEWS

4th February : Town Hall, Birmingham.
Concert of Works by Lutoslawski, Prokofiev and Bartok, given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maurice Handford, with Shura Cherkassky as soloist.

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With music of the 20th century finding an ever larger place in the repertoire of the C.B.S.O., it was not surprising to discover that on February 4th their programme was dedicated entirely to works, which, if not contemporary, were at least written in the last 60 years. The occasion provided the opportunity to hear the CONCERTOS FOR ORCHESTRA of both BARTOK and LUTOSLAWSKI, in the same programme. The third work in this concert was the 2nd PIANO CONCERTO OF PROKOFIEV. When this work first appeared, in 1913, a Russian critic described it as "a welter of barbaric sounds, with unbearable cadenzas; what might be expected if an inkwell were capriciously upset" - to which I have nothing to add.

The Concertos for Orchestra were a very different matter. They provided a unique opportunity to compare the music of two Eastern European composers, the one a Hungarian, the other a Pole, in the same medium. Bartok wrote his concerto for Orchestra in 1944, in America. Once known as the most popular piece of 20th century music, its popularity seems to be on the wane, although it still retains a large army of devotees. The concerto was written by a poor, ignored, embittered, old man of 63, the year before he died. For all the gaiety and jolly "popular" music, or perhaps because of it, I find that the underlying bitterness of the man comes through the music and stays with one. This element is very disturbing in that one is constantly aware of the deliberate superficiality of much of the music.

By comparison, my reaction to the LUTOSLAWSKI, written between 1950 and 1954, was that here was a work of great effect, carefully written and very well balanced. One could feel the shadow of BARTOK on the music; not the BARTOK of the Concerto for Orchestra, but rather of the 5th String Quartet, or the MUSIC FOR STRINGS, PERCUSSION AND CELESTA. The music was full of vitality, with an interesting variety of textures, the percussion being especially effective and well handled. The performance of the Lutoslawski was of a very high standard, creating a well-balanced and pleasing sound. Unfortunately, by the time the Orchestra reached the BARTOK they seemed to be flagging, and gave what can best be described as a very weak performance, utterly lacking in conviction.

IAN LLOYD.

5th February : Barber Institute of Fine Arts.
(University of Birmingham) lunchtime
piano recital of music by Prokofiev and
Debussy, played by Julia Illingworth.

This programme, consisting of Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata and Four Preludes by Debussy, provided a good opportunity to compare the styles of these two composers. Debussy achieves his effect by directness. Every note, phrase and chord is enjoyable, not only as contributing to an overall effect, but as a value in itself. From the very beginning we are at once in the realm of intense musical feeling. Prokofiev, on the other hand, uses indirect methods to achieve his effect. We listen to long sequences, repetitive and often uninteresting in themselves, but which acquire value by relation to other parts of the music or cumulatively with the passage of time.

This contrast between directness and indirectness of style was well displayed in this concert. Miss Illingworth performed the Prokofiev with just the persistent energy and confidence required to bring out the effects of its long and complex movements. The directness of Debussy's style, by contrast, was thus immediately evident when she then played four of his preludes. She conveyed the atmospheres of these pieces very well, most memorably in a brilliant performance of the mysterious and exciting "Fireworks".

CHRIS VILLARS

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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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18th February : Town Hall, Birmingham.

Concert of Works by Messiaen and Shostakovitch given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Ladies of the Birmingham School of Music Choir, conducted by Louis Fremaux.

Possibly the most enterprising of all the C.B.S.O.'s concerts this season took place on February 18th, when the orchestra coupled a performance of Shostakovitch's Tenth Sumphony and Messiaen's "Trois Petites Liturgies de la Presence Divine".

The Messiaen work, like the later "Turangalila" Symphony, calls for the prominent use of ondes martenot John Morton executed the sometimes tricky passage work with assurance, playing, to quote the programme note, "the only ondes martenot in existence in this country". John McCabe (piano) and Harry Jones (celesta) also proved themselves well able to combat the considerable demands of the solo parts. However, Town Hall acoustics apart, the piano could often scarcely be heard in the tutti passages, despite the full chords and triple forte indicated by the composer. The ladies of the Birmingham School of Music Choir were completely convincing in their taxing role, and whether their material was sung or spoken, articulation and ensemble were steadfastly maintained. Again in the tuttis, they too were swamped by the string band and ondes.

While admitting that all that glitters is not gold, the first movement of the Shostakovitch symphony seemed like cold stone against the preceding shimmering gold and emeralds. Unfortunately, ten minutes would have been more than enough to do justice to the material used in this movement; one only regrets there having been more than that. The second movement seems

almost an anachronism after its predecessor - a full-blooded scherzo in a style well exploited by Hollywood, before and after 1953 (the date of the sumphony's composition). With the third movement (at least the second half of if) Shostakovitch lets drop his first surprise, as the tam-tam heralds a series of mimicking sections based on the brazen outbursts of the second. This movement is arguably the most original in construction and inherent material, and certainly the least predictable. The final movement, in contrast, is predictable enough for Shostakovitch - a slow introduction leading to an allegro which gets interrupted a few furlongs from home by a breathing space, before the final homeward dash, with side-drum stirring every worker to his feet.

It is easy to see why this sumphony is such a favourite with both orchestras and audiences, but, for my taste, its duller moments were dull from the first hearing, and its brighter ones dull after several. This does not reflect the performance under Fremaux, which could hardly have been more rigidly controlled or vivacious and wholly involved.

PHILIP LANE

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3rd March : Barber Institute of Fine Arts.
(University of Birmingham).

Concert of Works by Bach, Foure, Schubert and the first performance of John Casken's 'Improvisations on a theme by Piet Mondrian", given by the University Chamber Orchestra.

John Casken's work was written for the orchestra last year between October and December. The "theme" of the improvisations, a painting entitled "Red, Yellow and Blue" by the modern Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, provides, according to the composer, little more than a spring-board for the composer's imagination and musical "improvisations". Indeed, Mr. Casken asserts that any coherent parallels between the elements of the piece and the three colours suggested by the Mondrian painting are to be understood as merely superficial relationships between the improvisations and the precise colouristic elements of the "theme".

The performance was fluent and convincing, on the whole, with pleasing interpretations of the beautiful solo writing for flute and oboe, and sensitive string, piano, harp and percussion playing. The work itself seemed sombre for the most part, and cold and sinister for the rest. If I may, in spite of the composer's notes, be allowed the comparison with colours, the pervading feeling was of steel blue (especially suggestive in the chords at the beginning for piano and lower strings) with occasional tints of pale yellow in the "sinister" and rather weird sections e.g. the oboe solos towards the middle of the work. Although the "Improvisations" were framed in one continuous movement, there was a fairly clear division of the work into two parts, whilst a restatement of the opening material formed a fitting and pleasing coda.

While I must admit that I was not greatly moved by the work as a whole (although I cannot claim to be in a position to make a complete assessment of its content after only one hearing) there were elements and whole sections which I found evocative and gripping. I admired the appropriate, if unusual, orchestration, as well as the use of certain effects (such as the fairly frequent use of "Col legno" in the lower strings and the parallel trilling and isolated passages on piano and celesta). A second hearing would certainly be appreciated.

J. CHRISTOPHER GATISS

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4th March : Town Hall, Birmingham.

Concert of Works by Handel, Dickinson and Elgar, given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maurice Handford, with Simon Preston as soloist.

Peter Dickinson's "Transformations" received its first Birmingham performance at the C.B.S.O. on 4th March. This work was a commission by the Feeney Trust in 1970, and was first performed at the opening concert of the Cheltenham Festival that year. The work is a "Hommage to Satie", and indeed reflects the sort of mood that Satie was trying to create. This raises an interesting point : the composer insists that this is a serious work, yet its very nature, and its compositional procedures led the audience to regard it as somewhat light-hearted. The composer may continue to insist on the serious nature of the work, but the music itself says otherwise; the audience's reaction very definitely proved this. I am tempted to wonder whether the "serious" label is Peter Dickinson with tongue in cheek - in true Satie spirit.

The music itself proved to be a most enjoyable experience; the performance was good and well received. I was particularly impressed by a very good use of percussion - so often a favourtie toy played with by modern composers who do not realise the art of percussion writing. The work also shows that the composer has a good sense of movement and climax, the second allegro section was particularly impressive and displayed some well contrasted orchestral colours. It was interesting to note that the opening chords (separated by chords on the celesta) and the chords of the central chorale were extremely "organ-like" : - a "lapsed organist" at work on the orchestral line !

The Dickinson work was preceded in the programme by Handel's Organ Concerto op 7 No. 1, the second half being devoted to a performance of Elgar's first symphony. The orchestra, conducted by Maurice Handford, gave a good rendering of this work, although Handford's sense of expression was a trifle wooden and the performance was not as good as I would have liked. Overall, though, this was a good performance by the C.B.S.O. of a sensibly balanced programme.

PETER FAIRHURST

PREVIEWS.

25TH MARCH: Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham.

There will be a concert containing much 20th century music (including two first performances) in the B.M.I. on Thursday 25th March at 1.10.p.m. Given by the Lusingando Brass Consort, a string quartet and Andrew Giles (countertenor) it will contain works by Laurence Williamson, Peter Bullock, Poulenc and Horowitz.

Laurence Williamson writes of his Brass Sextet as follows:-

The work was conceived over a period of five years. I originally thought of writing for a Brass Band, but soon decided that the usual Brass Band compliment would be far too heavy for what I wanted. Nevertheless, the original idea does survive and is now the beginning of the second movement. I first thought of this in the summer of 1966 whilst walking over the moors above Rautenstall and Bacup at 4.o'clock one Sunday morning, recovering from the previous night's drunkeness. I found the grey, wet dawn over the Rossendale Valley stimulating, but it is important to remember that, although, perhaps, this was responsible for the stimulus, in no way was it responsible for the content of the music itself. It is not my intention to convey anything, neither the Rautenstall dawn, nor any emotional response to it. I do not consider the music to be a means of expression; it is simply organised sound. Logic and comprehensibility are my sole aims.

To achieve this, I make rigorous use of serial technique: the row provides all the melodic and harmonic material of the work and is common to all movements. The work is almost in "arch" form; the two outer movements use common material, but a coda drafted onto the final movement disturbs the equilibrium of the cycle.

Peter Bullock, who has composed a setting of "The Journey of the Magi", Writes:-

In this setting no attempt is made at word painting; the piece is a purely musical unit. The words are treated as a musical element, and they have an inextricable part to play in the music. The voice and flute are equally important in a dialogue, to which the stringed instruments add a relief, in both a universal and individual sense.

Of the rest of the programme, Peter Fairhurst, who devised and arranged the concert writes:-

Of Poulenc's Sonata for trumpet, horn and trombone, only the first and last movements will be played. The sonata shows well the composer's light, humorous style and contains some good and clever writing for brass instruments. The concert will close with a performance of the Music Hall Suite for brass quintet by Horowitz, an amusing, if slightly banal, set of five pieces in a light, easy-to-listen-to style.

7TH and 14TH MAY: Elgar Concert Room, Faculty of Arts, University of Birmingham.

The lunchtime concerts on these dates (each at 1.10.p.m.) are in the regular weekly series organised by the University Musical Society. They will be given, not in the Barber Institute as is usual, but in the Elgar Concert Room, and will be presented entirely by students.

The concert on Friday 7th May will be given by the University Improvisation Group, an ensemble formed to play partially indeterminate works and improvisations. (See Peter Dickinson's article, entitled "Manifesto" in this issue) The group will perform pieces by Stockhausen and works composed by members

The concert on Friday 14th May will consist entirely of student compositions performed by students. The programme will include songs by Libby Macnamara, Alison Rushby's setting of "The Owl and the Pussycat" for speaker and ensemble and a work for flute and piano by Keith Potter.

28TH MAY: Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.

It may not seem worth recording that a new ensemble has been formed (September 1970) composed of young musicians, but the Osiris Music Group (who are giving the Musical Society's lunchtime concert on Friday 28th May) may qualify for particular mention on several counts. All the members are still music students, yet have given public concerts in the Midlands and in the London area. They are booked for two festivals in the West Country, as well as their quarterly series of concerts in Cheltenham.

Their aims are truly laudable; they include- to quote from their constitution - "to promote contemporary music (in particular that of composers living in and around Cheltenham) together with works of neglected composers and unfamiliar works of major composers. The group was formed to give young musicians the opportunity to perform in public that music for which they have particular sympathy, and not the limited standard repertoire which, in all honesty, should be the last music young performers play, given the overcrowded record catalogues and Radio Three."

Their programme runs as follows: Berners: Valses Bourgeoises; Debussy: Syrinx for solo flute; Peter Lawson: Four Songs from "Sitting in Farmyard Mud"; Philip Lane: Colloquy 1 for flute and piano (1st performance); Faure: Clair de Lune; Duparc: Songs; Stravinsky: Three Easy Pieces for piano duet.

PHILIP LANE.