CONTACT

a journal of contemporary music

32

SPRING 1988

SPECIAL ISSUE PRICE

£5.00

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A journal of contemporary music **no.32 Spring 1988**

Edited by Keith Potter, Hilary Bracefield, Celia Duffy, Christopher Fox, Roger Heaton and Peter Owens

This issue is edited by Hilary Bracefield and Peter Owens

Subscriptions

Subscriptions and back numbers are dealt with by Philip Martin Music Books, 22 Huntington Road, York YO3 7RL, telephone York (0904) 36111, to whom cheques should be made payable. Rates in currencies other than sterling and US and Canadian dollars are available on request. Subscription rates for two issues per year are as follows:

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This issue was typeset by Brenda Mason, tel. (03212) 3446, and printed by K.P. & D. Ltd., Metrohouse, Fifth Way, Wembley, Middlesex, tel. 01 903 4331/2.

ISSN 0308-5066

Arts Council Funded

Richard Toop

Four Facets of 'The New Complexity'

To those depicted herein
and, especially, to Kate

The following pages imply a view of priorities in new British music which is not, on the whole, shared by the British musical establishment, though it has adherents enough elsewhere. Of the four composers considered here – in order of age, Michael Finnissy, James Dillon, Chris Dench and Richard Barrett – none was included in Paul Griffiths' *New Sounds, New Personalities collection,*[1] which can be taken as a fair indicator of current establishment tastes. Yet they possess sufficient force to have become, along with Brian Ferneyhough, the corporate subjects (or victims) of a new catch-phrase: 'The New Complexity'.

'To define a thing', writes Nietzsche, 'is to begin to lie about it'. Leaving aside the appropriateness of the 'New Complexity' label, it has the effect of lumping together composers who, from many points of view, might prefer to remain separate. But just as there is no smoke without fire, so there are few pigeon-holes without a grain of truth inside them. Clearly there *are* points of contact between these four composers, just as there are differences which in the last two or three years have become so pronounced as to make this, perhaps, almost a last chance to regard them as a (disparate) unity. My desire to look at them this way springs from a conviction, already expressed elsewhere,[2] that alongside Birtwistle and Ferneyhough, they represent the few possible sources of light within a scene otherwise dominated by (to coin another catch-phrase) 'The New Capitulationism'.

The strategy of what follows is, in essence, threefold: a taking-apart, a view of each composer *sui generis*, and a tentative reconstruction. That is, I shall first try to establish some of the vital technical and aesthetic links and distinctions between the four composers, using basic categories such as notions of complexity, style and tradition to articulate them. Secondly, I shall deal with each composer in relative isolation. This central component of the essay is its main substance, and for each composer the approach is again threefold: a general introduction, an interview (all the interviews date from November 1986) and an informal analytical examination of, what are for the most part, recent works. Finally, and rather briefly, I shall seek to relocate the composers within a broader context which may, despite everything else I have written, show how much they have in common.

The analytical sections, perhaps, require comment in advance, in terms of scope, aims and approach. The relative brevity with which each selected work is treated should make it clear that in no case have I attempted a 'comprehensive' analysis, or anything close to one. The very notion of a comprehensive analysis inevitably invokes, for me, Borges' parable of the idealist cartographers whose map of a country is the same size as the country itself (and even that image is, where new music is concerned, often unduly optimistic: from my own recent work I could cite, among others, an analysis of Ferneyhough's *Superscriptio* which, though entirely cursory, occupies more pages than the score itself).

So the analyses are partial and, indeed, in a double sense. Whereas much recently-published analytical work is intended not only as an exegesis of individual pieces but as a contribution to a more or less specific theoretical genre, I should make it clear that mine, both here and elsewhere, does not share the latter aspiration. I am, of course, seeking to give a provisional account of the compositions I discuss; beyond that, however, my main aim is to give some indication of each composer's creative process, of *composition* as a 'putting together' of *personal* preoccupations, both aesthetic and technical.

Given this aim, the ideal situation requires access to the composer's sketches or equivalent materials. Chris Dench and Michael Finnissy kindly supplied me with a wealth of sketch-pages, and Richard Barrett gave some very helpful analytical comments. James Dillon was most generous in supplying scores and recordings, but preferred not to release his sketches for study; my comments on his work, therefore, are necessarily more speculative and more prone to substantial error – they can only offer a view of how the works *might* have been created.

Concerning the analytic portions, Richard Barrett wrote:[3]

> I'm still slightly cagey about exposing the 'anatomy' of the pieces to closer scrutiny at this stage. Maybe this is because the music *qua* music is insufficiently well known for a verbal exegesis not to run the risk of being offputting

The point is well made, and has been at the back of my mind every time I have formulated or reproduced any kind of 'abstract' chart. However, rather than retreat from analysis, I have proceeded with the optimistic conviction that the pieces will soon reach the broader audience they deserve, and that those readers with an aversion to technical analyses will find sufficient matter in the interviews to arouse their interest.

Complexity

The term is, of course, so loaded as virtually to preclude rational debate and particularly so in a country like Great Britain where 19th-century traditions of amateur music-making and all-purpose anti-intellectualism are still very much embedded in the collective psyche of the musical establishment. A word which, on the face of it, should refer simply to relative difficulty of technical execution or density of musical substance becomes, in critical hands, a somewhat drab polemical weapon, dependent on residual prejudices rather than a considered aesthetic position (all in all, it is surprising that terms like 'formalism' and 'cultural Bolshevism' have not staged a comeback . . .). So it is

not surprising that the composers involved are less than enthusiastic about the 'New Complexity' label:

MICHAEL FINNISSY: It horrifies me that people say the music is complex. It isn't, except in a very superficial detailed kind of way. It's complex if you accept that human beings are complex, and that all art is complex. But to say that it's complex with the implication that somehow it's not 'refined' enough, or that somehow it should conform to the ideals of an 18th-century French garden – you know, geometric precision, economy of pitch-statement *à la* Webern: that's completely ridiculous. Hardly any music is like that, and critics who think that contemporary music *ought* to be, have got their heads stuffed up their arses.

CHRIS DENCH: Funnily enough, the notion of complexity came about through much older pieces, which were very much more skin-deep – pieces that had the flashy surface and nothing underneath. And people would look at the 11:15s I had rather arbitrarily thrown in, and say: 'Oh, this is terribly exciting'. And to some extent even *Topologies* (1979) is a bit like that . . . [Nowadays] I am against that kind of melodramatic surface. Again, I think that 'complexity', as most people understand it, is a kind of hyper-intellectual teasing-out of the skin of the music. O.K., that's great, except that you're not really offering complex music, you're just offering a complex process of generating it.

As one grows up and matures one wants to express more rich and plural things; one's experience richens, and yes, I think that results in more complicated pieces. Inevitably that's the case: even a composer like Hans Abrahamsen, who decided at first that he was completely going to avoid any kind of complication, has gone more and more *into* complication.

It would be disingenuous, I suppose, to deny that, compared to the vast majority of works emanating from the British Isles, these four composers' works have their complex aspects. At a technical level, certainly, they are mostly aimed at performers with virtuoso techniques (including, of course, Finnissy himself) and, as with Ferneyhough, the mere appearance of the notation is often fairly daunting. Yet I would doubt whether any of their works places the same kind of consistent technical and, above all, psychic strain on the individual player as Ferneyhough's recent music. Even so, the difficulties *are* sufficient to confront each composer with the prospect of inaccurate performance as the rule, rather than the exception. The foundation of the Exposé group in 1984 was one response to this dilemma; but one can't really devote the rest of one's life to writing for a handful of players so provisional stoicism tends to be the order of the day:

RICHARD BARRETT: A hypothetical perfect performance would encapsulate a lot more music than a *pro tempore* one does, but I'm fairly confident, with the experiences I've had so far, that these things eventually become far more second nature than some people would have us believe. But the crux of it is that, for the moment at least, I would rather set down the musical ideas as they are, and accept a certain amount of indeterminacy from the players, than say 'I can't do this', and then not do it and thus produce a work which, to an even greater extent, is a betrayal of the musicality behind it.

It is a mixture of Luther's 'Here I stand' and Beethoven's 'What do I care for your wretched fiddle', and it is the attitude towards instruments *per se* that partly conditions the level of performance difficulty: whether one regards the instrument in the Bach/Xenakis tradition as a sort of organ stop, to be switched on or off at will, or as part of an organism whose other part is the body of the player. In the first version, the only point at issue is whether or not something is physically possible. (Whether or not the physical movements necessary to produce the notes are physically 'idiomatic' is not, within this view, the composer's problem.) It seems to me that much of the writing in Dench's later pieces falls into this former category (although much of *Tilt* (1985), though very difficult, is also very 'pianistic') and some of Finnissy's does too (though once again, not the keyboard writing). Dench sees it this way:

I'm *not* interested in writing music that can't be played – that's stupid. If there is no mechanism by which something can be done, it simply gives the performer a hard time. You can only 'stretch' the player if you do something that is feasible but hard.

On the other hand, it seems to me that a piece like Dillon's *Sgothan* (1984) – or the beginning of the Barrett's *Coïgitum* (1985) – involves difficulties which are extrapolated more or less idiomatically from the physical nature of the instrument itself.

The one incontestable point of similarity between the four composers lies in the surface appearance of their notation, which is a) complex, and b) very meticulously written. It is probably Finnissy, with his financially enforced experience as a copyist, who provides the model here, rather than the calligraphically more mannerist Ferneyhough. In music which often involves a complex overlay of irrational values, precision and legibility are clearly essential, and although the calligraphy of each composer has its own distinctive features, in no case is it an aesthetic component of the musical idea (as might be asserted by Ferneyhough, or even Bussotti) as opposed to being merely a vehicle for it.

For Dillon, what is now regarded as standard 'maximalist' notation arose from a crisis with an early (withdrawn) choral work entitled *Babble*:

I had a terrible problem when I was writing *Babble*, in which I used a combination of traditional notation and space-time notation. The use of traditional mensural notation heightened that for me, because there were certain things I knew how to do quite comfortably and others where I simply had no idea. I remember first seeing the space-time notation used by Stockhausen in *Momente* (1962-72) – it was in Karkoschka's book on notation[4] – and I had got to the stage where I was so desperate to continue working on the thing that I just lifted this solution. But I was uncomfortable from the moment I lifted it; I was really unhappy about it, because there always seemed to be a gap between the results of space-time notation and what was on paper. There's a kind of ideology working there, and after a while it begins to generate its own kind of predictable results. That was the first time I began to see that there was a problem inherent in notation itself; before that, I had been using it rather mechanically – I hadn't thought too much about it. At the time I was doing a linguistics course, so I was beginning to be very analytical about things like the relation between the notation and whatever it was a symbol for. The next piece I wrote was *Dillug-Kefitsah*, (1976) where I used complex irrational rhythms, and I thought I was probably on the right track: it actually won a prize in '78 at the Huddersfield Festival, and then, in '78 or '79, (Ferneyhough's) *Transit* was done . . .[5]

In Ferneyhough's work, though, the irrational values are generally a means of redefining the overall rhythmic flow from one bar (or beat) to the next and merely provide the framework for complexly sculpted internal rhythms. With the younger composers (and most drastically, perhaps, with Chris Dench) a more obvious model is Xenakis, and the aim is usually, as with Xenakis, to create different simultaneous pulses which are usually periodic and, far from seeking to redefine motion *at* the barlines, these periodic groups habitually go *across* them.

Microtones

Another 'complicating factor' in the work of all four composers is their frequent use of microtones (usually quarter-tones). Not that microtones are *per se* harder to produce on wind and string instruments than semitones – but the fingerings are less familiar to wind players, while for string players there is, inevitably, the sensation of straying onto all the parts of the fingerboard one had been taught to 'miss out'. From an acoustic point of view also, at least in polyphonic music, the harmony is likely to become a great deal more opaque.

Two immediate questions arise: where does the desire to use microtones come from, and what purpose do they serve? On the first point, only Chris Dench cites a 'concert-hall' source – not by Ferneyhough (who first used them in *Epicycle* in 1968) nor even Xenakis, but Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Photoptosis* (1968). Dillon and Finnissy evoke more 'ethnic' origins; for the former, 'having been exposed to the bagpipes at a very early age, I've always found microtones very comfortable', while Finnissy refers to an experience at the age of sixteen:

I was working for a Yugoslav ballet teacher, and one day she just arbitrarily suggested to me, would I be interested in taking down in notation some Yugoslav folk dances she wanted to use for a show? Of course, I was thrilled to bits, and when she got out these recordings I was just amazed. So far Bartók was the only composer I knew who had handled that kind of music, and here it was in the raw state.

Although Barrett's conception of microtones is a relatively formal one, it is probably reasonable to trace their appearance in his work back to experiences in free improvisation, which tends to inhabit a markedly 'untempered' world.

The actual deployment of microtones in a work inevitably involves expressive and theoretical considerations. On the one hand, Finnissy invokes the speculations of his spiritual mentor:

Busoni talks somewhere in one of the essays about melody being an endless curve which you fix the points on. I suppose if you imagine a Hokusai-type curve, instead of the more regular geometrical type, one would need quarter-tones in order to fill in more interesting kinds of shape.

Yet when Finnissy composes with microtones, the expressive element is always very much to the fore, with the 'lament' styles of much Eastern European folk-music, as in *Catana* (1984), the String Quartet (1984) and the String Trio (1986), of which more below. For Dench, who once referred to Xenakis's *Shaar* (1983) as a 'work of singular sadness, which had a sobbing quality unlike anything I know', the emotive aspect of microtonal writing is clearly important, and its sheer unfamiliarity can be a part of its effect – hence he says of the final section of *Enoncé*, 'I used third-tones to give a very odd effect of strangeness, to be really unearthly . . .'. Yet here, at least in part, the emotional effect on the listener is the result of being confronted by a seemingly impassive harmonic system. Of the quarter-tones in the string quartet *Strangeness* (1985), Dench says:

I had deliberately tried to make the harmony as anonymous as possible. Because the piece is about despair and grief, and I didn't want a harmonic language with too much character, because it would have contradicted the generally solemn nature of the piece.

In principle, one might expect the same attitude from Barrett who is inclined to describe his microtonal procedures in relatively cold-blooded terms:

If you go back as far as *Essay in Radiance* (1981-3), there are passages which are microtonal and passages which aren't, and that was set up as a formal determinant in the work. And in *Coïgitum* I was very interested in working out a way of organising the harmonic material such that it could be used both by the piano keyboard, and by the flute, oboe and voice parts which are in quarter-tones throughout, and also by the percussion part which is functionally unpitched. But in the heterophonic ideas which give rise to *Anatomy* (1986) it really is an essential part of the way the material works, and it wouldn't have been possible to use an equal-tempered chromatic instrument because the semitone is too coarse an interval to use in the normally distributed heterophonic texture.

Yet in *Anatomy*, and even more so in the later *Temptation* (1987), the effect of the microtonal usage is far from clinical; it may be emotionally bleak (what else should one expect from a Beckett devotee?), but it is also extraordinarily turbulent in a repressed and disturbing way.

Dillon, probably the most metaphysically turbulent of all four composers, simply denies the validity of the tempered interval:

I don't actually hear in terms of tempered tuning anyway. Our division of the pitch continuum was a practical solution to deal with when you bring a lot of musicians together – we don't actually hear like that. Anyway, our perception of sound-phenomena in time is so contextually based – you're forever mapping one sound onto another sound; you're very much aware of the interlink, in this omnidirectional continuum, of sound itself and how it works in nature.

Style

The notion of 'style' is always problematic, especially in relation to new music: depending on how you view the term, it could denote either the trivialities or the essentials of a composer's oeuvre. For reactionary critics, it becomes a matter of principle to deny the existence of style in works using organised 'parametric thinking' (to borrow Ferneyhough's phrase); for style is personal (*'le style est l'homme'*), and how can the composer enslaved by numbers (as they imagine) have a personality? At the other end of the spectrum, the composer may have some justification for believing that 'style' is a means of journalistic stereotyping which leads to works being judged in terms of their conformity to whatever the critic in question has determined a particular composer's 'style' to be. In keeping with this latter view, all of Finnissy's works would be piano solos in which all seven octaves were constantly hyperactive; Dillon's would grapple relentlessly with some post-Varèsian 'harmonic block'; Dench's would begin with some sort of aural 'chaos' which gradually dissipates into more identifiable melodic lines, while Barrett's . . . well, hard to say, but it is rather like Xenakis (paradoxically, as we shall see, Barrett is the only one of the four to feel comfortable with the notion of a 'personal style').

Such stereotypes are not entirely misleading. Although, for me, one of the many attractive features of these composers' outputs is that they are perpetually in transit – always searching rather than settling – it is also true, I think, that each of them has a set of very strong 'behavioural patterns' that they bring to bear on each new situation, and that is what I would call 'style'. Still, it is no discredit to them that they see the issue differently:

JAMES DILLON: I have problems with the word 'style': it carries with it a whole set of notions that are problematic. Obviously there is something one can discuss in terms of

approximations . . . But style for me is to do with a kind of 'ideo-structure' in a work: perhaps it exists as certain idiosyncratic or idiomatic things that exist almost out of one's control. I don't want to sound over-mystical about this, but they exist as a kind of emanation of practice itself; it's problematic for me, because on the one hand it's very difficult to pin down, but on the other it always implies (for me) a certain inauthentic relationship with one's practice. I think that if one were actually aware of a 'style', in the sense of some kind of foreground activity, then I don't see how one could regenerate the necessary astonishment about what you're doing: being able to codify that, to put it into neat formal classifications, sort of denies your engagement with what you're doing. It's rather frightening when you look at it that way, because you become terribly aware that maybe you're just going round in circles all the time.

MICHAEL FINNISSY: It (the idea of 'Finnissy's style') is immensely irritating, but if I become at all aware of it I try and change direction *abruptly*, and I would refute any attempt to try and categorize the music as anything. I am interested only in going on perceiving and trying to convey the important aspects of what I feel passionately about to someone else – to my hypothetical 'other', at the very least. Everything else follows from that. 'Style' in itself I'm not interested in cultivating, or conscious of. You are yourself, so I suppose you *are* your style without having to try to be, but I don't think it's interesting to try and be a 'stylist': that would mean almost writing the same piece over and over again.

CHRIS DENCH: I've always been very unhappy with the kind of personal identity fetish that a lot of composers have, which makes them compose out terribly carefully these intricate, very narcissistic structures on the skin of their music. I always regard the notes – the skin of the music – as a kind of ephemeral stylistic phenomenon: as 'fashion' basically. I think it's very important not to intervene consciously (in the compositional idea) or rather, to intervene *almost without knowing it* is the essential point, to let the intervention be out of one's innate musicality, rather than out of some conscious desire to form it in a direction: to allow it to try and do what it does itself.

RICHARD BARRETT: Brian Ferneyhough has said to me on various occasions that all my pieces are totally different from one another, and I think that's quite true inasmuch as at the moment I'm in the process of moving around and attempting to define the centre of it all – what you might call a 'style' beneath the various movements to and fro. I can now begin to feel certain stylistic constants beginning to work their way out of me, which I'm not suppressing, because that's what the whole experimentation process has been about so far.

Cyclomania

Perhaps the most unexpected point of contact between these composers is that, at the moment of writing, all of them except Finnissy (who says 'big projects scare me', but still creates big *pieces*) is committed to an extended cycle of works: Dillon to a *Nine Rivers* cycle which will include *East 11th St NY 10003* (1982), and Barrett to a six-part *After Matta* cycle (including *Coïgitum* (1985), *Ne songe plus à fuir* (1986) and *Illuminer le temps* (1987)) and a potentially nine-part *Fictions* cycle (*Anatomy* (1986),*Temptation* (1987), *nothing elsewhere* (1987), *Earth* (1987-8), *I open and close* (1988) and others to be announced), while Dench, in addition to a pre/post-nuptial 'Venice' Trilogy *Venezia* (1986), *Acqua alta* (1987-), *Sulle scale della Fenice* (1987-) now projects a larger *Afterimages Sequence* that will probably incorporate the 'Venice' pieces.

In a situation where many of these composers have difficulty enough in securing adequate performances of single pieces, one cannot help asking 'Why?'. Is it a publisher's perception that cycles are 'in'? There are precedents, of course, as diverse as Gerard Grisey's *Espaces acoustiques* (1974-85) and Ferneyhough's *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1982-86). But was it not also a cycle (*Firecycle*, in fact) on which Ferneyhough came to grief in the late sixties, even if it was another one, or at least a series (*Time and Motion Studies*), that brought a *'retour à la vie'* in the early seventies?

In his 1986 Darmstadt lecture, Richard Barrett comments:

If [my] musical works are to be optimally self-contextualising, it is preferable that they be presented in the company of one another, rather than in the environment of an inevitably disparate programme whose listeners are required, often in vain, to reacclimatise themselves at short notice perhaps as many as eight times in the course of a concert. Given the evaporation of any kind of 'common practice', individual works can become almost meaningless in such environments. I feel that we should be ready to grasp the implications of this situation, rather than apathetically bemoaning it . . . If we therefore wish to concern ourselves with composing *programmes* rather than *pieces* . . . we have the opportunity to compose the relationships between works as a kind of extended *formal* planning.

It is by no means a unique response: ever since the early seventies, Stockhausen has sought ways of ensuring that his new pieces share a programme with no-one's works but his own. And Dench, too, has the same attitude; despite his very broad musical tastes, he says:

Each piece of mine begins and ends with an infinity of silence, which is one reason why I hate having them in concerts with other pieces. I didn't write my music to have a Haydn symphony played after it. Personally, I can't stay in a concert hall after a piece of mine has been played – or even *before*, because I can't hear my piece if my inner ear has been 'corrupted'.

Tastes, Influences, Relations to Traditions

Student days apart, there is no particular reason why any composer should feel drawn to the works of others, and a sober look at the documentation concerning major figures of the past generally reveals anything *but* catholicity of taste. The familiar, rather desperate attempt of conservative music-lovers to assess the credibility of a new composer by asking, 'Does he/she like Beethoven too?' is an impertinence in all senses of the word. As Richard Barrett puts it:

One comes in with the idea that there is all this music around, and some of it is great, and one might just be able to do something. Then one gets to the stage where one has more affinity with one's own work – it seems a strange thing to say – than with anybody else's, and eventually you get to the point where interest flags in anything else. I'm not trying to strike a pose of 'hating music' – for a composer to say that is obviously dishonest or stupid; maybe it's just that something is lost along the way – that one's ability to have the patience to come to terms with other music is grossly attenuated. But there's no alternative: that's the way it is.

Of the four composers considered here, Barrett's position is probably the most 'exclusive': he acknowledges the influence of Xenakis, and notes some affinities between a piece like *Coïgitum* and some of Finnissy's music but for the most part receives his 'outside impulses' from painting and particularly from literature: Flaubert, Lautréamont, but above all, Beckett, quotations from whom are to be found at the beginning and/or end of almost every score.

Dench, on the other hand, admits to an almost bewildering diversity of origins and inspirations, unified only by the fact that they are all 20th-century:

The poles of my musical language are Scriabin, who supplies all kinds of harmonic controls; Ives, who supplies the kinds

of densities and pluralities, and all those wonderful conceptions of layout; and Xenakis, who supplies the *Angst*. Those are the three composers that matter to me. There are plenty of others I admire enormously, like Ferneyhough, and James [Dillon] and Michael [Finnissy]; but I don't really engage with their music at the level I do with those other three.

His enthusiasms are by no means restricted to 'constructivist' schools: he admires Dusapin's 'red-hot fury and intensity of vision', his ability to 'write pieces that simply spurt onto the page, almost completely unmediated' – Radelescu and the later Nono are other major enthusiasms.

Finnissy's tastes are no less eclectic – more so, in fact, since from the viewpoint of composer (as opposed to pianist, or simply music-lover, which composers *can*, after all, also be) he is interested in the music of earlier centuries, as well as this one. He refers to 'a general catholicism of taste' which exists, however, not just as a guide to passive 'consumption' but as a seemingly endless stream of influences and inspirations to be 'worked through':

I guess quite a lot of (my) music comes from other types of music. I found folk-music inspiring very early on, and if I am influenced by other composers then I sometimes like to write little 'homage' pieces which acknowledge the fact: *Ives* (1974), *Grainger* (1979), and *Nancarrow* (1980). Recently I've done two such pieces, one of them a homage to my teacher Bernard Stevens . . . and it has a companion piece – *GFH* (1985) – which honours a composer I have been very interested in for the past couple of years, Handel, the clarity and ebullience of whose music has been very inspiring to me.

Contemporaries, while by no means a matter of indifference to Finnissy, are not 'inspirations' in the way that older music is. Of Ferneyhough, whom he knew back in Royal College days, he says:

I have immense respect for what he does, and I get immensely angry when I see people misinterpreting it, or putting it down. Our attitude to a lot of things in music is very similar, but the end result of digesting those things is very different, and has become even more so over the years. Our music is *not* similar, *at all*.

Finnissy's attraction to Xenakis, too, is that of a listener rather than a predatory composer, as an aspect of being 'automatically drawn to Eastern European music'. For James Dillon, on the other hand, Xenakis offers a series of valuable, yet not incontrovertible, ways of looking at musical material (see the interview below). Interest in the past tends to be linked to particular genres and even to particular types of performance which bring out in past works those qualities which Dillon seeks to implant on his own:

The quartets in the literature that I love all have, I think, a certain labyrinthine quality about them: a certain density of information everywhere, if you like . . . I find it impossible, in fact, to listen to certain 'quartets' playing quartets, and I have a fascination with the Busch quartet – hearing them play something like Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden', I find them bringing out so many things that other quartets don't. I think the thing with Busch is that you get a polyphony of timbre, a polyphony of sensibility – it's not just in terms of polyphonic voices. But of course, the late quartets of Beethoven are the most obvious examples of that kind of density. And yes, the Schoenberg quartets . . . but I think there is only one post-'45 quartet 'in the tradition', so to speak, and that's the Ferneyhough Second Quartet.

Michael Finnissy

A whole host of legends and images have grown up around Finnissy, the vast majority of which (unlike the subjects of most legends) he is vehemently inclined to deny. Some of the denials are justified; others are just southern Anglo-Saxon modesty. Even more than Ferneyhough, he has acted as a father-figure for many of the young English radicals, even if their work has turned out, almost without exception, to be very different from his. He has offered both the concrete model of a committed artist adhering remorselessly to his beliefs in the face of shoddy performances and public scepticism, and that of an eloquent performer-advocate of his younger colleagues. Finnissy dislikes being thought of as a professional virtuoso pianist. Fine: in that case, one can say without fear of contradiction that he is one of the world's most sensationally gifted amateurs (how many 'professionals' could manage his *English Country-Tunes* or the end of Barrett's *Coïgitum?*) and that the total failure of recording companies to preserve those gifts on record, compact disc, or tape, is yet another English cultural disaster.

Finnissy is also, arguably, the arch-Romantic of new English music. For all the 'rationality' of certain procedures outlined below, one could almost imagine him uttering the words Schumann wrote to Clara Wieck after composing the *Humoresque*: 'This whole week I have scarcely left my piano, composing and laughing and crying, all together' (and the *Humoresque*, let us remember, is also a very 'constructed' work). His work list is large, not on account of 'facility', but because of consistent, obsessive work. From the last five years one should note:

1983 *Vaudeville*, mezzo-soprano, baritone, two mimes and seven players
1984 *Cantana*, nine instruments
Ngano, mezzo-soprano and tenor solos, chorus, flute and two percussionists
Celi, two sopranos and five players
Haiyim, chorus and two cellos
String Quartet
1985 *'. . . above earth's shadow'*, seven players
Contretänze, six players
1986 String Trio
Verdi Transcriptions Book 1, solo piano
1985-88 *The Undivine Comedy*, opera
1987-88 *Gershwin Arrangements*, solo piano
1986-88 *Red Earth*, orchestra

MICHAEL FINNISSY: Years and years ago, when I first read Busoni's essays in the Dover paperback,[6] there was a lovely essay there on transcription, which started off as a defence of Liszt, of the process of taking another composer's material and actually transforming it. But the conclusion that Busoni arrives at, which I find most interesting, is that 'notation is itself the *transcription* of an abstract idea. The moment that the pen takes possession of it, the thought loses its original form' – in effect he's saying that *all* written musical composition consists of transcription in one way or another: a transcription of the substance, or the inspiration, or whatever it is that comes to you. Then the audience, listening, transcribes that experience after the performer has, in fact, transcribed the notation. It's the kind of on-going process of taking

something and treating it, via the realm of one's inner experience, so that something else comes out as a 'message', or piece of information, for an audience or a performer to grasp. And so for me, taking another composer's material is a means of highlighting a musical process: if I don't originate the material, then the *process* of composition, meaning 'what is actually happening to X', is perhaps clearer for people to understand.

RICHARD TOOP: You mention Busoni, and rightly or wrongly I also tend to think of you, up to a point, in terms of Grainger. Has this model of the virtuoso composer-performer had an influence on you?

MF: No, not consciously at all. In fact I didn't start giving professional solo-concerts until 1977, and even that was an accident; by that time I already had a certain small reputation in Europe as a composer.

RT: That's curious, because younger composers like Dillon, Dench and Barrett tend to cite you as a model of the composer 'doing it himself'. Was that something that came later?

MF: That was never my intention at all, and I don't have any aspirations towards virtuosity. Indeed, I curse the fact that I ever played the piano every time I practise for a concert, because it takes so much time. I fundamentally think of myself as a composer; I get up in the morning and I think of music paper, not the piano keyboard. Frankly, as soon as I can ditch that side of things, I will: there are people now like Damerini who can cope with that.

RT: Thinking back to your early pieces, like *Song 9* (1968), isn't there an inherent 'grand virtuoso' style lurking in them? I remember they also reminded me of certain aspects of Bussotti.

MF: Bussotti was a composer whose scores I first saw when I was eleven or twelve years old. I got a copy of the *5 Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959) when they came out, but I never heard the music, and when I did hear it I didn't think they were very interesting. Sorabji is another person that people have thrown up as an influence; but the sound of his music is atrocious! No, what is at the origin of those pieces is also a very fundamental part of my compositional philosophy, or aesthetic: trying to capture phenomena moving at different rates, to impose a rhythmic grid somehow on different kinds of metric pattern. It's an influence that comes from Ives, if anyone, but I really caught up on it from film, or from simply looking out of the window, trying to perceive the phenomena around me. Things don't move in regular 4/4 or 3/4: they move at all manner of rates – speeding up, slowing down, independently. I wanted to capture that excitement, that dynamic, kinetic quality. And so the 'complexity' of things like *Song 9* is in fact an attempt to come to terms with *those* things, and not just on a small scale: the form itself is a description of that, with many (so-called) silences interspersed amongst the material, which is a way of trying to incorporate *non*-action, or things going out of sight which you assume are nonetheless continuing into the formal structure.

RT: How *do* you approach the whole business of formal structure? Is it something you pre-plan, or is it something that arises naturally out of the material as you work on it?

MF: A bit of each. I try to develop an attitude towards the form, an *intention*, which I then play with – expand, sometimes alter. Usually the forms are very simple: a progression from one point to another, or an interrupted progression. I try to make them as monolithic as possible, just so that I've got a simple framework for a complex series of actions. The implications of the material sometimes change, and mostly the timings of things change. The intention I don't think ever does: if I wanted to have a piece doing a particular kind of thing, then that would remain, whatever the material itself dictated as a result of my working on it.

RT: In that case, are big forms there to give more latitude, because you seem to concentrate more and more on big forms these days – I was thinking of the *English Country-Tunes* (1977) and the *Verdi Transcriptions* – or do you just prefer something massive to relate to at a given time?

MF: No, I don't, and big projects scare me. *English Country-Tunes* is actually not that recent – it's ten years old – and the Verdi project started about three years earlier than that, but at the time I simply didn't have the technique to transform the material in a way that would produce the kind of on-going structure that I wanted. Every time I picked it up, I would be frustrated at my inability to carry it through. Now, at least, I do feel I'm at a different stage where I'm more able to reconcile myself to the original material – I see more scope in it than I did when I started work in 1973-4. And the big forms are similarly a result of being more confident about handling larger spaces of time . . .

RT: When you talk about 'technique', are you thinking in terms of specific dependable devices – ways of working the material that you enjoy using – or is it simply a matter of accretion, of a familiarity in handling *any* material?

MF: Yes, familiarity in handling *any* material. Fluency is really what I mean. I'm interested in a sort of armoury of technical devices, and in absorbing all those other techniques that I've always been interested in, such as those of folk-music. In a sense you can never stop; you can never have enough technique. Everything you do makes new demands on you, and you have to go and learn other things, by researching and so forth.

I do have certain routines, which I need as sort of trip-mechanisms, if you like, for evolving material in the first place. I use random numbers a great deal, simply to filter the material, or shake it up: to present possibilities. Basic pitch choices and things like that can come in two ways. Either I generate – I get an impression of what I want to do in terms of overall sound and then work from that generalisation towards particularising it in some way or other – or I work from specific motivic material, which is usually very restricted.

For example, in the String Quartet I decided that I wanted the lines, the polyphony, to implode on itself as much as conceivably possible. So virtually all the melodic material of that piece occurs within the interval of a minor third or considerably less (in quarter-tones) which makes the explosions of more chromatic material so much more dramatic. That was a conscious choice, and from there I had to decide to evolve the material in certain ways, and most of the other things just come out of that.

RT: Is the fact that some instruments are more susceptible to microtones than others, and some not at

all, a major consideration when you write a piece? For example, wind instruments *can* produce microtones, yet listening to *Contretänze*, the basic decision seemed to be that string instruments *are* microtonal, and wind instruments aren't.

MF: That's another kind of compositional decision. There's a kind of harmonic quality that results from microtonal working which is different, obviously, from chromatic working, which is different from modal and pentatonic working. And if I were fascinated by interfacing those different types, or a selection of them, then that's a choice I would make either in terms of instrumentation, or the sections of a piece.

In the piano piece *All. Fall. Down.* (1977), *'All'* pretty systematically uses all the notes of the keyboard as rapidly as it possibly can. But within that, some subsections of that material are fully chromatic, some are all white notes, and more rarely, some are all black. So you notice shifting types of harmonic feel. Now having reconciled myself to the fact that pianos can't play quarter-tones – I didn't really want to re-tune pianos – I evolved a type of material which compensated for the lack of microtones by covering enormous areas of space with resonances: you obliterate a conventional sense of harmonic development and replace it with something which is very similar to listening to microtonal working.

RT: That's a charateristic I always used to associate with your music, perhaps because I mainly knew the piano pieces put out by Universal Edition. Was that kind of saturation of harmonic space general in the other pieces of that period, too?

MF: It was pretty general.

RT: It seems less so now.

MF: Well, one can't go on doing the same thing for ever. I think that as a composer one probably has about half a dozen basic compositional precepts. One goes through different stages in evolving these precepts: at a particular time you're interested in one or two of those six, and then you come back to others. Working on a composition, I separate everything out – pitch, rhythm, and so on – for individual consideration and working, but that's with the acceptance that finally all those things are blended together. I separate them out so that I can examine them under the microscope, as it were. But the end result is what I suppose one could call *harmonia*, a moving harmony in which pitch and rhythm are the most obvious components, and dynamics and timbre the next most. All the pieces I write in a given period have pretty much the same characteristics; but then, over a year – or two or three years – they evolve to a different point, and that's because *I* have evolved too, and I'm examining something else.

RT: What are the current precepts?

MF: I don't think I'd be able to identify them clearly, because I'm working through them – uncovering them, re-discovering, re-revealing them.

RT: You can look *back* at them, but not actually *at* them?

MF: Yes, retrospectively, seeing what they *were*. I feel that it's overly self-analytical, or just too self-pre-occupied, to examine these issues too constantly: it detracts from writing freely and spontaneously. I have now become dissatisfied with the period represented, I suppose, by the String Quartet, as a *ne plus ultra* of working with very densely impacted pitch-materials – which in its own way was an attempt to get away from melodies leaping around over two-octave spans: I decided, 'Well, O.K., you've done that, go the opposite way!' I'm a creature of extremes – black and white, no grey!

And now? I don't know: English folk-music has always been of great interest to me, because once I realised that I was automatically drawn to Eastern European music, I thought, 'Well, this is a bit silly: you're not Eastern European, so look at your own folk-music'. And that's very fascinating too, but the modalities of English folk-music were initially harder to reconcile with the kind of aesthetic attitude that came out of Webern and Stockhausen, composers that at fifteen or sixteen I was deeply fascinated by, and imitated. But over the years I have attempted to come to terms with more 'exclusive' pitch material – things which are not chromatic, but have things left out. And I think that quite a substantial part of my continuing interest in composition, if I have to say anything about it at all, has to do with being fundamentally fascinated by melody, by line: line, and juxtapositions of lines. Long ago, I had sort of reasoned to myself that folk-music was at the origins of music: it is part of a search for archetypal musical gestures which are the fundamental characteristics of all types of music. I'm very interested in 'archetypes' – in uncovering them and being able to reveal and use them.

RT: Can you elaborate on that a bit?

MF: I hesitate to – it's getting into deep water, but obviously it comes from reading Jung – the business of certain kinds of fundamental psychological attitudes and reactions; that in one's perception of the world one reacts to stimuli, and that some of them are archetypal. I spent a long time reading Eliade, Levi-Strauss, and other anthropological writers: their studies of tribal notions and folk notions; the way in which customs (which then lead to forms of theatre and, by implication to other forms of literature, folk-song, shamanistic ritual and this kind of thing) arise from those basic 'archetypal' responses to nature. Man's attempt to come to terms with his environment, I suppose one might say. I don't think of myself as any different from that kind of artist, except in terms of living in a so-called 'civilised' country.

RT: Well, that's the big question. Do you think these things are transferable to an urban environment?

MF: Yes, because I think they are integral to the human psyche. Obviously they occur in different mutations, and you have to find them in yourself, but all human beings cry and laugh, and have an attitude to what they see and hear and generally experience around them. I'm expressing my feelings, my laughter and tears, in the music I write. So I decided that if I were to study folk-music, I would do so to seek out the roots of music itself, to try and find out what the 'archetypal' musical gestures were, and – perhaps – what they were the symbols of in human experience, and (in connection with that) to try to perceive anew what the components of music were. A minor second, a major third: what does that actually *mean* to me, aside from its traditional functions or its historical outgrowths? Because when you're dealing with music of any type, you're also dealing with its social history.

RT: But I wonder, if one is looking for these archetypes and then deploying them in such a densely polyphonic style, how much of the archetype remains?

MF: I believe that if you plant a seed, and a tree grows, you still know it has come from a seed. Maybe someone else doesn't, and if you look at a tree, you don't see its roots – you simply know they're there. But there is something about that structure which is dependent on the roots being there, and I think that's pretty much the same with a piece of music. If the intention is strong enough, then something of that intention communicates itself, and by analysis you can work back to what it was. For example, if I make a piece like the String Trio which is fixated on the interval of a minor third, then everything about the piece is based on that interval: the modulation schemes, and so forth. But when you're listening to it you don't think, 'Oh my God, another minor third – how tedious!', because hopefully the composition has eradicated that. Yet that *is* what a piece like that is about, at any rate in one sense. So whatever the archetype is – whether it is a certain rhythmic characteristic, a kind of driving percussiveness, or some more euphonious kind of thing, certain kinds of archetypal melodic patterns – if you imbue enough of the structure with that, it somehow grows into something else.

RT: Your output is quite substantial. Do you think of yourself as a rapid composer?

MF: No. A piece usually begins *very* slowly and *very* painfully: it's like pushing a heavy object up a hill. Sometimes I put a lot of precompositional stuff on paper, but on the whole I prefer to have it swimming around in my brain to sort it out, and when I've got it to a certain point I start making notations of the 'elements' of the piece: rhythmic ideas, pitch ideas, instrumentation ideas, things like that. It can also be very frustrating, but I enjoy it a lot: the creative situation of finally, having seized all these stimuli, being able to make choices. That is an important and exciting step for me. Then, actually doing the composing can be *so* frustrating, because you've got this idea of what you want to achieve, and getting there sometimes takes such a long time. The maximum of music I can ever write in a day is about a minute, and that's with any instrument – solo line or anything else.

During this year – admittedly it has been a disturbed year in some ways, but not essentially different from any others – I have written three pieces: a String Trio which is a long piece, admittedly, but not immensely complex, a five-and-a-half-page piano piece lasting around four minutes, and a song cycle for voice and piano which I should say lasts eight or ten minutes. I don't think that's a vast amount of work, 44 minutes of music in 365 days. Obviously I'm starting other projects which will take longer, and completing others (like the *Verdi Transcriptions*). But I don't think of that as work which has been done *exclusively* this year, simply as work which has just been started, or come to fruition.

RT: Once a piece *is* finished, what is your relation to it? Do you sever an umbilical cord, or do the pieces follow you round?

MF: Some of them haunt me! Inevitably, though, I wait for the first performance, and the response to that performance, because I think if people like them I'm happier about letting them go. If people don't, then I clutch them back like a mother or father clutching their child to their bosom. But I don't necessarily do anything to them; they go into the cupboard or onto the shelf. I try very hard to forget about them and get on with the next piece. But that process doesn't happen until a piece has actually been performed – till then, it's still hanging around in the background, and it's sometimes very difficult for me to get on with other pieces.

RT: How much sense of communality do you have with younger composers like Chris Dench and Richard Barrett? Their work is very different to yours, but do you feel that it's something that you're part of, broadly speaking, if only because of the influence you may have had on it?

MF: No, I don't like to be imitated or parodied. When Richard first showed me *Coïgitum*, I said, partly joking, 'Oh that's good, I never need to write that kind of piece again.' I think composers misunderstand each other: often quite deliberately, and inevitably for their own ends. Dench, Dillon, Barrett and I know each other, so there is that (very superficial) community feeling, and sometimes it's fun to talk to them – though I find their preoccupations very intellectual! – but I'm against the idea of a *Davidsbund*, against 'exclusivity'. I like Howard Skempton, Christopher Fox, John White and Chris Newman, and want to play their music just as much as that of the other composers we've mentioned. I feel close to it even if it seems different from anything that I'm doing; it's all music that I passionately believe in, and needs hearing and cherishing, and I just don't like the idea of ghettos of any kind.

* * *

Any selection of works to represent Finnissy is likely to seem arbitrary. I have settled for what seem to me to be the two most impressive of his recent works, the *Verdi Transcriptions* and the String Trio. Given its importance in Finnissy's output, the piano almost inevitably had to feature in my choice, and the Trio can be taken, among other things, as a *ne plus ultra* of his microtonal style.

Verdi Transcriptions Book 1 (1986)

The first book of *Verdi Transcriptions*, though amongst Finnissy's most recent works, has origins that go back to 1973 and reflects preoccupations that go back still further: I think the first piece of Finnissy's I ever saw was a beautiful but slightly perplexing paraphrase (now withdrawn) of the 'Love' Scene from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*. Each of the nine pieces is based on a melodic fragment from one of Verdi's first nine operas: in order, *Oberto, Un Giorno di Regno, Nabucco, I Lombardi, Ernani, I due Foscari, Giovanna d'Arco, Alzira* and *Attila*. In principle, there should be another three books and another seventeen pieces (one for each opera), but at the time of writing (December 1987) this seems unlikely: there are sketches for another seven pieces (let's hope that a *Falstaff* transcription is among them! . . .), and there may be one more book forthcoming, but that could be all.

The broad notion of transcription, in the Busoni–Finnissy conception, has been mentioned above. More specifically, in an introduction to a performance of *Verdi Transcriptions*, Finnissy remarks:

> Transcription means [here] that the musical material of the original Verdi opera is transferred from his psychology to mine. At times one can hear fragments in the music that sound a little like Verdi, but for the most part not.

And elsewhere, he notes:

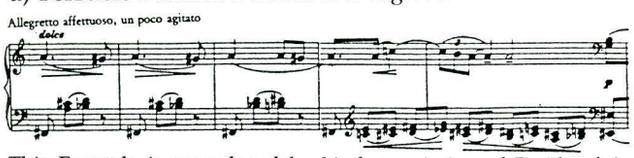
The original Verdi material never, in any of the pieces, determines more than the general melodic/rhythmic/harmonic contour. There are, even in the straighter transcriptions, wide divergences of harmony, rhythm and melody; and fundamentally, once isolated from their *dramatic* context, Verdi's materials are like fish out of water: I needed to create an environment for the music to swim in, and this inevitably means rethinking the 'form' from top to bottom. So I took the melodic (or whatever) material that I needed and reduced it to whatever *Gestalt* I could then re-shape and compose with as my own.

As a whole, Finnissy says, the pieces are a homage to Busoni, and while Verdi (in a rather Godowskian guise) makes his presence strongly felt in the left hand of transcription no.V, he is somewhat outdone in no.VIII by Busoni, part of whose *Indianisches Tagebuch* provides a very perceptible rhythmic and gestural matrix for the whole piece (see Example 1). Taken all in all the *Transcriptions* are also – even more than the better-known *English Country-Tunes* – a remarkably comprehensive résumé of Finnissy's various approaches to keyboard composition. The spiky counterpoint of piece no.IV, the sultry opulence of no.V, and the transcendental virtuosity, in forms both ancient and modern, of no.VI, and much else besides, could easily form the basis of extended comment. Here, however, I shall confine myself to the first and seventh pieces, with the aim of giving some indication of Finnissy's working methods, at least as they apply to this work.

Though it is quite possible (and in this context, essential) to look at the pieces singly, one should not underrate the degree to which they are conceived as part of a large cycle. One obvious aspect of this is the way in which the end of each piece evolves towards the start of the next. Another is that the pieces were not composed sequentially from first to ninth, and their structure sometimes needed to be modified to balance them with preceding or subsequent pieces.

Example 1

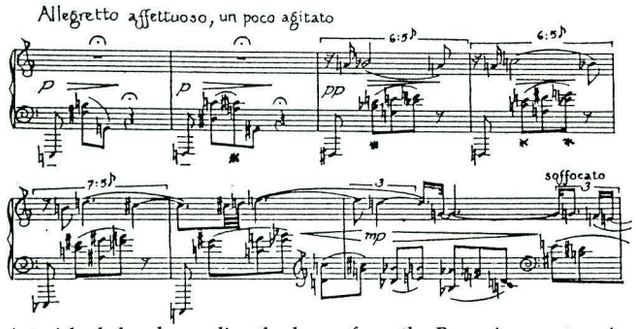
a) Ferrucio Busoni: *Indianisches Tagebuch*



This Example is reproduced by kind permission of Breitkopf & Haertel, Wiesbaden

b) Giuseppe Verdi: 'Il pianto . . . l'angoscia', from *Alzira*

c) Michael Finnissy: *Verdi Transcription VIII*



Asterisked chords are directly drawn from the Busoni excerpt, as is the general texture; there are, clearly, striking parallels between melodies *a* and *b*.

The first transcription (on 'Sciagurata! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!' from Act 2 of *Oberto*) is typical in this respect. The piece consists of four sections, of which the fourth is much the longest:

1. Presto (14 bars): a tumultous chord-sequence in the bottom register, heavily pedalled, for left hand alone, articulated by a sequence of eight crescendi from *ppp* or *pp* to *ff* or *fff*.
2. Poco allegro (12 bars): a 'quasi recitative', again in the lowest register, and with almost the same dynamic extremes, but with constant oscillations between one and six notes, whereas the Presto was almost entirely in two or three voices.
3. Più tranquillo (19 bars): the introduction of a polyphonic texture – three layers of chords, with mainly three-note chords in the top voice, two in the middle, and four-note chords at the bottom. Both hands are now involved, but the tessitura still does not go above the F below middle C.
4. Largo gravemente (29 bars): a more complex continuation of the texture of the Più tranquillo which gradually rises to the F *above* middle C.

The only really systematic sketches – i.e. sketches in keeping with the kind of notations for separate parameters referred to above – are for the final section, leading one to surmise that it was the first to be composed. Finnissy confirms this, and puts the fact in a broader perspective:

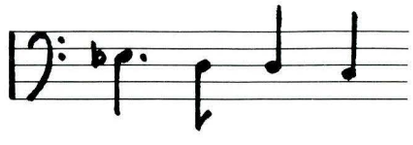
As I try to allow pieces to grow organically, rather than rigidly prescribe a form at the outset, I often begin pieces *in media res*. Particularly with longer pieces, I make a point – some way into composing – of considering 'endings' and 'beginnings': trying to assess how to 'frame' or otherwise 'get into' a piece, or what the moment of 'lift off' will sound like – trying to hear *through* often fairly well evolved material to its origins or eventual extrapolations.

In the case of *Verdi I*, the Largo was indeed the first moment of *that* piece to be sketched. I had already got sketches, and one complete piece, for later in the cycle, and the 'general melodic contour' (Example 2) crops up as an ongoing *idée fixe* in several of the other pieces (a sort of Verdi thumbprint!) – so I was also conscious of building up towards later statements and (like the good stripper!) trying not to give too much away too soon, almost in the manner of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: gradually discovering the tune.

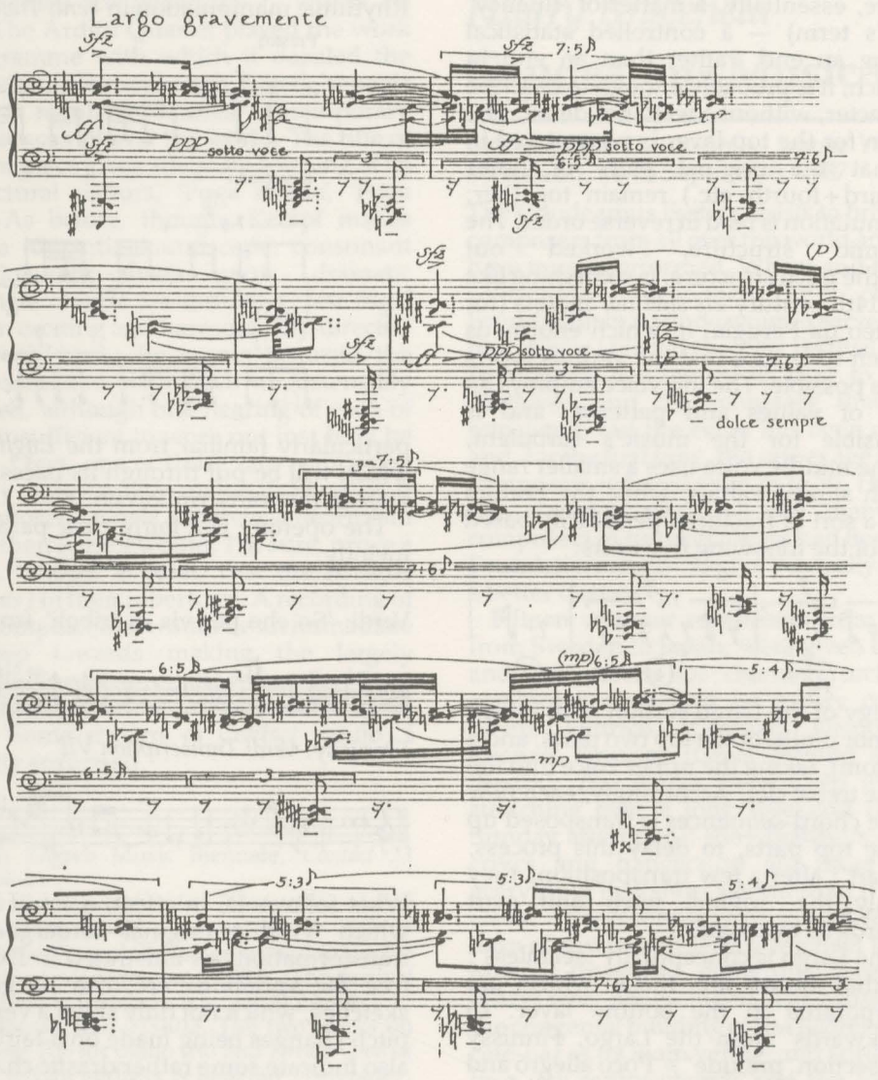
Having got the extension of the Largo material right (so I thought), I went on to sketch *Verdi II*, the music progressing up the keyboard from bass to treble registers. Then, at some point, I realised that the proportions of the first piece were wrong – it was too short and felt only like an introductory peroration, rather than a self-contained entity – so I added the Poco allegro, trying to develop the material 'backwards'; and once I'd done that, the *feeling* of the opening was 'wrong'. So the Presto was added, like a long 'upbeat' to fling the material into the air and then watch it settle.

Example 2

General melodic contour for *Verdi Transcriptions I*



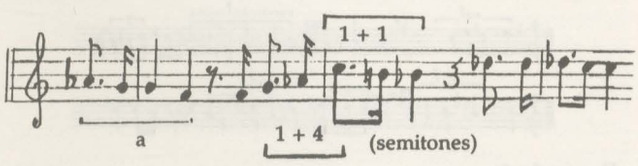
Example 3 Finnissy: *Largo gravemente* – Fourth section of *Verdi Transcription I.*



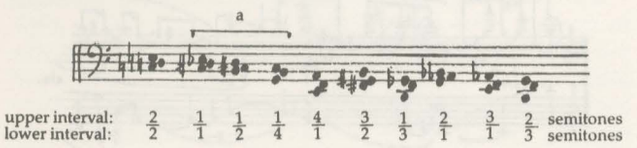
Taking my cue, therefore, from the compositional process, I shall look first at the construction of the Largo section (Example 3). How much is really supplied by the Verdi model, over and above the tiny cell Finnissy quotes above?

Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that the close-packed chords which form the top layer do reflect Verdi's melody in that, in both, the closest packing of three notes is a semitone+semitone, and the widest, a semitone+major third:

Verdi:



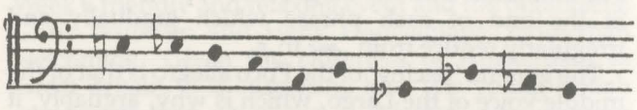
Finnissy (chords):



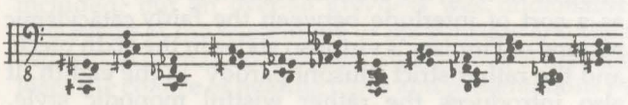
This is, of course, a reordering of all the possible triads (in the broad sense) within a span not exceeding a perfect fourth:

$$\frac{1}{1}\ \frac{1}{2}\ \frac{2}{1}\ \frac{2}{2}\ \frac{1}{3}\ \frac{3}{1}\ \frac{2}{3}\ \frac{3}{2}\ \frac{1}{4}\ \frac{4}{1}$$

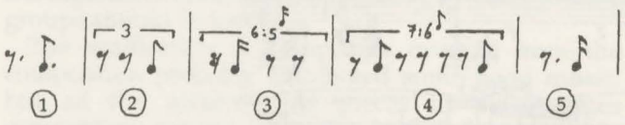
using a ten-notes series as the basis for transposition:



The middle voice uses a chain of nine dyads transposed to the same series (with a few *ad hoc* changes of order), and the bottom voice consists of a chain of twelve chords, composites of the triads in the top layer, initially transposed so that G sharp is alternately the upper and lower note:



The permutations and transpositions applied to these materials are, essentially, a matter of 'fluency' (to use Finnissy's term) — a controlled statistical means of effecting an end, rather than an end in themselves. As such, it is probably enough to describe their general character, without a welter of detail. The pitch series shown for the top layer is permutated in such a way that the original pairs of notes (first + second, third + fourth etc.) remain together; every second permutation is read in reverse order. The intricate rhythmic structure, worked out independently of the pitch structure, is something like one of those late-14th-century *ars subtilior* motets (for example, by Matteo da Perugia) in which enormous care has been taken to ensure that the various layers coincide as little as possible. The top voice employs an enormous range of values and patterns, and is primarily responsible for the music's turbulent, restless quality; the middle voice uses a smaller range of generally much slower values, while the bottom chordal layer has a sort of fractured periodicity based on juxtapositions of the following five units:



The broad strategy of the Largo section is an ascent in register (of a minor ninth for the top two parts, and a tritone for the bottom), taking the upper voice into the lower ranges of the treble clef. Accordingly, each new permutation of the chord-sequences is transposed up a semitone (in the top parts, to delay this process, there is a 'false start': after a few transpositions they return to roughly the original pitch and start transposing upwards all over again).

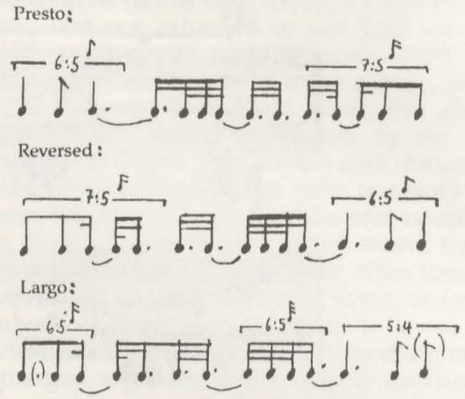
The texture of the Largo is conceptually 'seamless': the only rests that occur are those which are structurally incorporated in the bottom layer. In 'constructing backwards' from the Largo, Finnissy first creates a two-section 'prelude' – Poco allegro and Più tranquillo: the Poco allegro works with a single line of increasing density (one to five notes) in the very lowest register, thus preparing the way for the bottom layer of the Più tranquillo. The Più tranquillo, in turn, starts with a fragmented version of the Largo material (all three layers), and gradually works towards the continuous (seamless) texture of the latter. The upper part, for example, which is based on rhythmic retrogrades of the Largo (compare the opening of the Più tranquillo with the Largo, foot of p.6), has pauses at the end of each phrase which gradually and irregularly reduce from 𝄻 to 𝄽.

The general 'pacing' of the Poco allegro is that of the middle voice of the Largo, which is why, arguably, it would have made for a rather flat opening. Instead, still using the lowest register, Finnissy composes a Presto anticipating the Largo's top layer, and once again appearing to draw on the Largo for its rhythmic structure. Thus, for example, the last line of the Presto reversed turns out to derive from the fourth line of the Largo, with rationals and irrationals exchanged or modified (see Example 4).

I shall look at transcription no.VII (on 'So che per via di triboli' from *Giovanna d'Arco*) from a more general point of view. In the broader context of the cycle, it acts as a sort of interlude between the fairly catacylsmic résumé of Finnissy's virtuoso styles in the sixth piece, and the rather strict 'Busoni parody' in the eighth. It also introduces the rather wistful monodic style,

Example 4

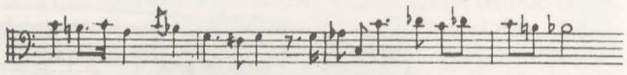
Rhythmic manipulation in *Verdi Transcriptions I*



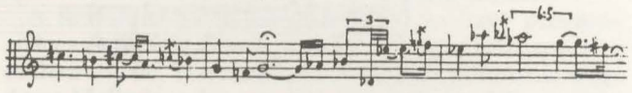
particularly familiar from the *English Country-Tunes*, which will be put through its paces on a much larger scale in the transcription no.IX.

The opening is a fairly clear paraphrase of Verdi's melody:

Verdi: 'So che per via di triboli', from *Giovanna d'Arco*



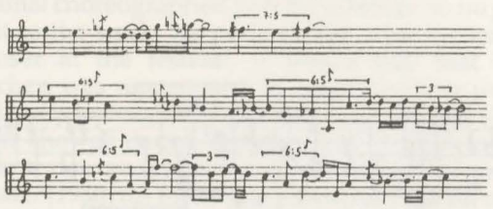
Finnissy: *Verdi Transcription VII*



What follows is, in effect, a set of free variations, in which Verdi's original undergoes a number of transformations as illustrated in Example 5. Just *how* free the variations are, can be gathered from the sketches, which not only show a very large number of pitch changes being made on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, but also indicate some rather drastic changes between the original conception and the final one. A first indication is the sketch for the 'tag' which leads from VI to VII. As remarked earlier, the function of these tags is to anticipate the texture of the next piece. Yet in the sketches, the tag runs as shown in Example 6, which vaguely anticipates a brief passage later in VII, but could scarcely be further removed from its opening (or from the later stages of VI).

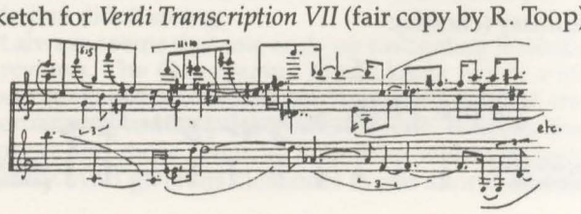
Example 5

Three excerpts from *Verdi Transcription VII*



Example 6

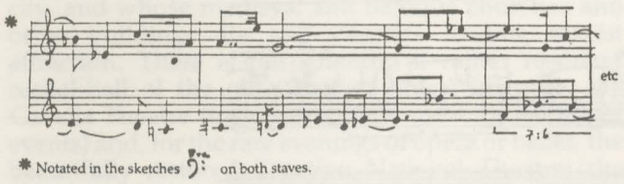
Sketch for *Verdi Transcription VII* (fair copy by R. Toop)



Another example of the composer's almost Schubertian ability abruptly to change his mind occurs about half way down p.38 of the score (second page of VII). After the held B flat at the start of the third line, Finnissy commences with a rather arid continuation of the previous texture (Example 7) then changes his mind completely, and replaces it with the luxuriant, almost Szymanowski-like passage given in Example 8, which begins to pave the way for the *Indianisches Tagebuch* references in VIII.

Example 7

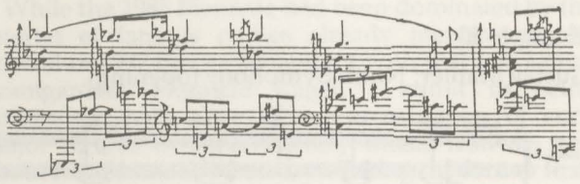
Sketch for *Verdi Transcription VII* (fair copy by R. Toop)



* Notated in the sketches on both staves.

Example 8

Verdi Transcription VII



Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this first book of *Verdi Transcriptions*, apart from the sheer quality of the music, is that despite such last-minute changes, and despite the huge range of 'musics' it contains, one really does hear it as one big piece, and not as an anthology of pieces with linking passages. Partly this is because of a degree of cross-referencing between sections that I have not been able even to touch upon here, but mainly, surely, it is a reflection of the intensity that Finnissy brings to the act of composing.

String Trio (1986)

If the eighth of the *Verdi Transcriptions* was a parody (in a quasi-Renaissance sense) of a piano piece by Busoni, the String Trio is one huge parody: it takes as its framework the psychological programme of the first movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, and the titles of its 28 parts are Finnissy's 'transcription' into Italian of Mahler's German markings. In addition, the opening F sharp – A – B of Mahler's symphony permeates the structure of Finnissy's Trio at many levels.

The 28 sections are grouped into five larger sections (7 + 4 + 3 + 7 + 7):

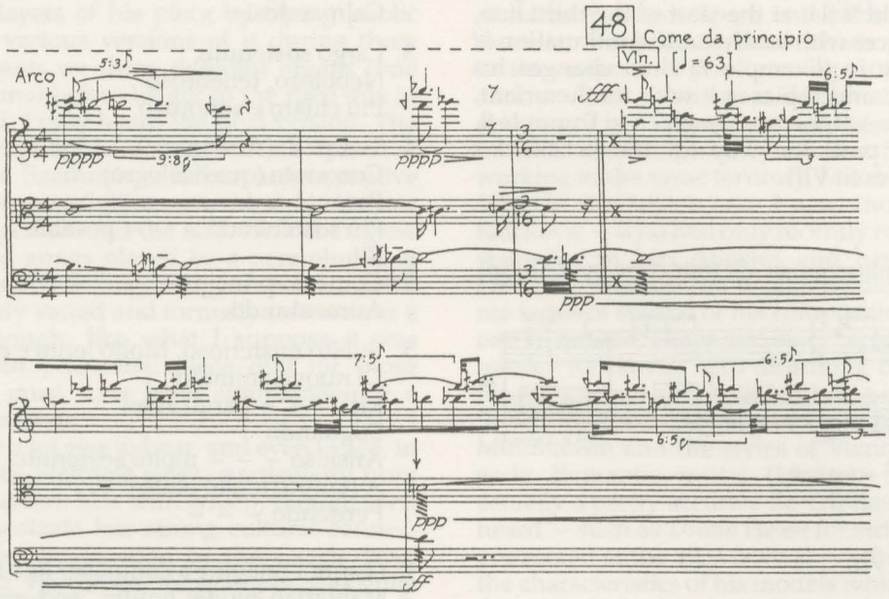
1. Andante comodo
   Piuttosto vigoroso
   Corrente
   Allegro
   Tempo I. subito (ma non trascinato)
   Molto moderato ed indugiando
   Un po' esitando – – cedendo al – – tempo I.
2. Allegro risoluto. Furioso
   Appassionato
   Più lento, raddolcendo
   Calmandosi
3. Largo sostenuto
   Nebbioso, tenebroso
   Più chiaro e sonoroso
4. Tempo I. (Andante)
   Con moto (quasi allegro)
   Pesante
   Più sostenendo – – – pesante – – – stringendo
   Rit. – – –
   Come da principio
   Aumentando
5. Subito misterioso. Molto lento e dolcissimo
   Di nuovo animato
   Rit. – – – Largo assai
   Sognando
   Ansioso – – – molto sostenuto
   A tempo (molto lento)
   Perdendo – – –

I cannot imagine a composer like Finnissy taking up a Mahlerian model lightly, and given the persistent emotional intensity of the String Trio, one can't help surmising an autobiographical element. Perhaps, as Adorno once said of Berg's 'Lyric' Suite, it is a matter of 'latent opera'; still, that is for a future George Perle to unravel – here, I shall deal with it simply as a remarkable piece of chamber music.

Before looking at the Trio in more detail, I shall offer a few words on Finnissy's string writing, which is not, after all, as much a 'known quantity' as his keyboard music. It is not an experimental style *per se*: it does not seek to re-invent the violin. The bow stays resolutely on the fingerboard side of the bridge, the left and right hands are not de-synchronised *à la* Ferneyhough/Hübler, and the player's aim is always to produce audibly the notated pitch. In fact, the basic technical vocabulary does not go beyond Bartók except, perhaps in the matter of compound *glissandi* (often in contrary motion).

And yet one really cannot talk of a 'conventional approach', since the result is so original and convincing. Looking for parallels, if one must, one might think of Scelsi (in terms of the constant search for intensity of sound), though the deliberately claustrophobic pitch-ranges in much of the String Trio never quite reduce to the Italian composer's 'one-note' obsession, and Finnissy's music is full of the polyphony which Scelsi's so scrupulously avoids. More relevant perhaps, is the Eastern European folk-music that has fascinated Finnissy since his teens: parts of the Trio suggest an imaginary, 'hyper-Balkan' folk-lament style (and it is this, I think, rather than any 'vectorial *glissandi*', that sometimes brings him close to the later Xenakis). It is surely folk-music, too, that provides the background for the Trio's constant, though not absolutely pervasive, use of quarter-tones; and it is these, above all, that determine the melodic, harmonic and emotional 'colour' of the work. Unlike Ferneyhough or Dench, Finnissy does not use micro-tones simply as an expansion of available pitch-resources – they are, above all, *expressive* resources. And since we respond to them most readily when used within a relatively narrow pitch-range, that is precisely how, for the most part Finnissy uses them; within the entire work, there are only two sections (the

Example 9
Rhythmically independent double-stopping in Finnissy's String Trio, p.32.

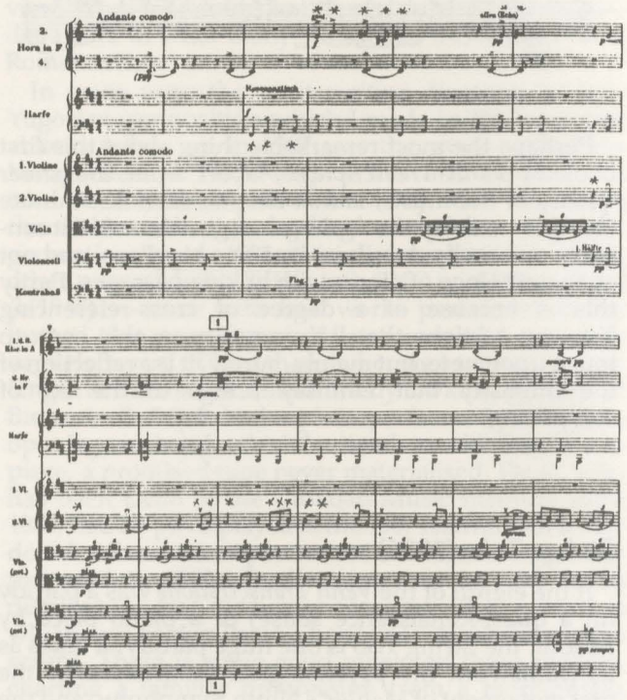


Più chiaro at the end of the third part, and the Di nuovo animato just after the start of the fifth) that use the jagged leaps that were the signature of the post-Webern era. One particular aspect of the violin writing (also found once in the viola part) requires comment: the use of a polyphonic double-stopping in which the two parts are rhythmically independent. This also occurs in Dillon's work, but Finnissy's version of it is spectacular in the extreme (Example 9).

One of the most impressive aspects of the String Trio is the way in which, despite a vast number of small subsections (each of which is clearly distinct from its neighbours in terms of surface articulation), the work avoids all trace of 'bittyness'. It seems to me that there are many concrete reasons for this. At the most local level, new sections are sometimes 'prepared' by the same kinds of tags as operate at the end of each of the *Verdi Transcriptions*; but a very rich cross-referencing of characteristic figurations also operates throughout the work, many of which have already been introduced more or less discreetly in the course of the first few pages. Moreoever, there are broad registral and dynamic strategies which operate across a number of subsections, or even whole movements. For example, the First Part (subsections one to seven) consists essentially of a very slow *crescendo* from *pp* at the outset to *f* half-way through the Allegro, and then a *decrescendo* down to *pppp*. Similarly, the Second Part starts with an abrupt *fff*, and slowly dies down to *pppp* at the end of the Third Part; the process is not absolutely linear, but has a certain sense of inevitability, all the same. Registrally, the First Part gradually ascends about one-and-a-half octaves from the middle register (with artificial harmonics at the end anticipating the sudden outburst of the Second Part in the high register). But the frequent changes in surface articulation, coupled with the overall *crescendo-decrescendo* process, remove all danger of the slow ascent being too didactically obtrusive.

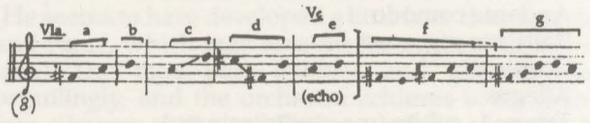
The longest thread through the Trio is that provided by the opening bars of Mahler's Ninth Symphony (Example 10). From this, Finnissy extrapolates a pitch sequence, which is gradually woven into the evolving texture of the Trio, in ever-lengthening strands (a, b, c,

Example 10
Gustav Mahler: Ninth Symphony (opening).



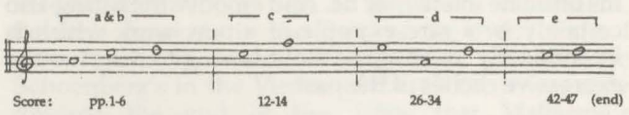
The pitches used by Finnissy as drones in his String Trio are asterisked.

etc) – first in the viola, alternating with microtonal melodies that set the basic tone for the work, and then, once the violin has entered, in the cello:



(the Mahlerian *portamenti* fuse very happily into the microtonal surroundings).

At a much broader level, a – e are deployed through the entire length of the work as a sort of broken *cantus firmus*: transposed up a minor third (the 'generating interval' of the work), they provide a series of drones or pedal points:



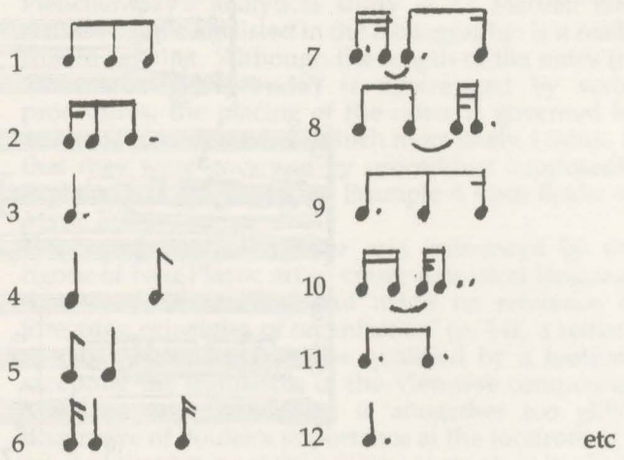
The treatment of the pedal points differs slightly each time. The first group has the function of leading from almost complete stillness – via the microtonal melodies, measured tremolos and unmeasured trills of the first subsection, and the more agitated tremolo figures of the Piuttosto vigoroso – to the double-stopped *glissandi* and almost Donatonian *gruppetti* of the Corrente (which was actually the first part to be composed). Since the material of the piece is in a constant state of evolution and flux, the drone itself remains totally impassive, the only moments of 'drama' being when it changes instrumentation or pitch, in accord with the rotating instrumental roles:

Vln:	*(tacet)*	trem.	micro-mel.	drone	
Vla:	Mahler + micro-mel.	drone	trem.	micro-mel.	etc
Vcl:	drone	Mahler + micro-mel.	drone	trills	

(drone): A ——— C ——— D

The second drone-group (C/F), emerges gradually from a trill-dominated Allegro (which is also the dynamic climax of the First Part), and having established itself on C, gently rocks to and fro between the C and F during the Tempo I., which follows. The next group comes with the start of the Fourth Part: the E remains stable for twenty bars, but the A is constantly 'tugged at' by microtonal groups in the other two instruments (i.e. whichever pair does not have the drone at the time . . .), and the D serves as an accompaniment, passed between viola and cello, to the violin solo at Come da principio. All these drones have been on, or just below, the treble stave; the last pair, which enter in the course of the Ansioso subsection, are in artificial harmonics at the top of the audible range, and gradually fuse into a double drone.

Having looked, in the *Verdi Transcriptions*, at some of the ways Finnissy handled pitch materials (and bearing in mind that the transposition and permutation procedures used there are also relevant to most of the String Trio), let us look now at two simple examples of the ways in which he builds up rhythmic structures. The Allegro passage in the First Part (p.10 ff.), which begins only with sharply rhythmic trill-sequences that are gradually eaten into by melodic figures and held notes, is in 3/8 almost throughout, and for the first page involves no irrational values. Finnissy sets up a 'vocabulary' of rhythmic units each lasting three quavers:

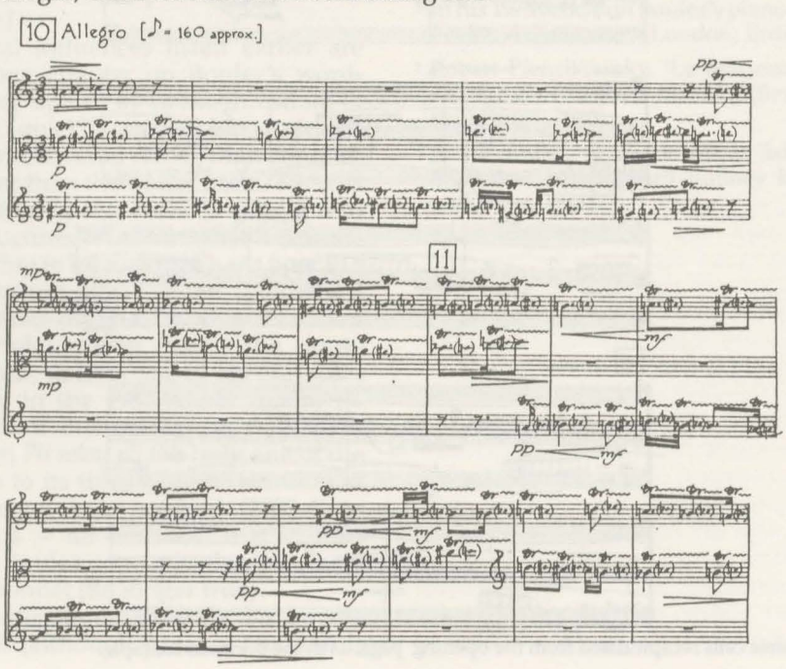


The opening of the Allegro distributes these as follows (cf. Example 11):

Vln:						6	4	2	1	3	11	11	5	5	7	4	9	4
Vla:	6	5	3	11	10	11	2	5	11					4	5	8	4	3 etc
Vlc:	4	6	2	10	5					4	7	1	11					

Cells of this kind are, admittedly, uncharacteristic of Finnissy to the extent that they are a) short, and b) designed to emphasise the bar-line, rather than

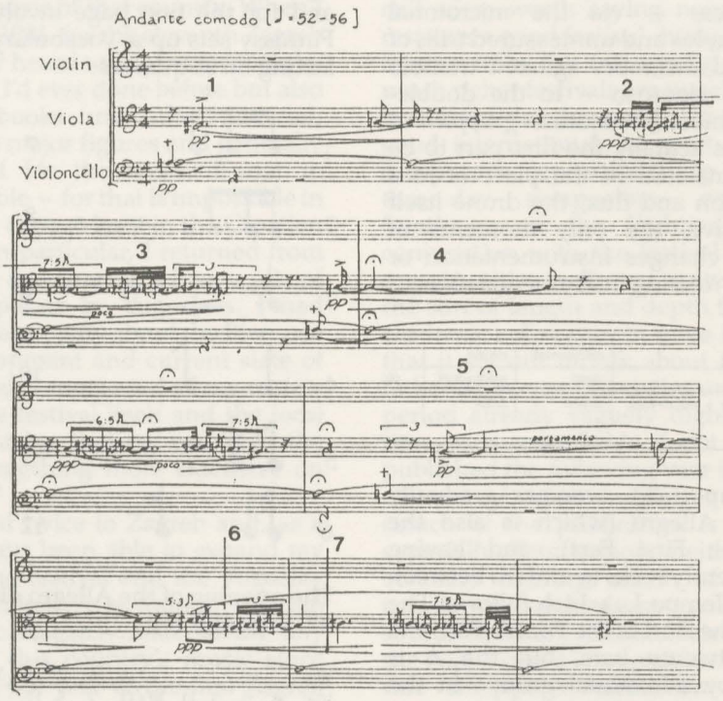
Example 11 Finnissy: Allegro, from the first Part of the String Trio.



eradicate it. A more characteristic example would be the sequence of rhythmic cells and single durations at the beginning of the works (see Example 12, nos. 1 to 7) which, along with cells from the beginning of Second Part and elsewhere, are built up into an inventory of 30 units, and recapitulated in permutated order at the start of the Third and Fourth Parts (Example 13).

It probably cannot be sufficiently emphasised, however, that although such examples may have a quasi-serial appearance, they are light-years removed from any kind of 'grand serial master-plan' mentality, *à la* Stockhausen: once again, they are examples of 'fluency' – the way in which a craftsman soberly martials and deploys his materials, however emotive his ultimate intent may be. And emotive the String Trio certainly is: a rare example of a new work which is intentionally 'moving' without having to resort to the expressive clichés of the past.

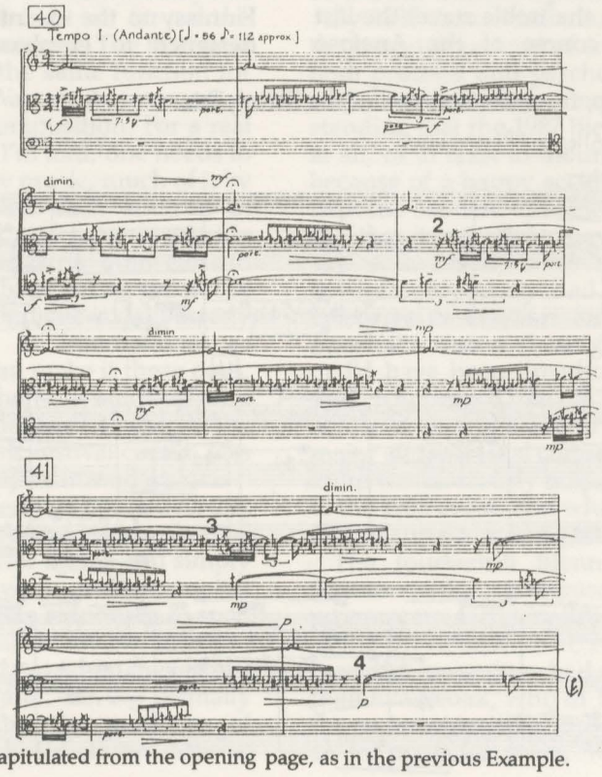
Example 12 Finnissy: opening of the String Trio.



The numbers 1-7 refer to rythmic cells which are recapitulated in permutated sequence later in the work.

Example 13

Finnissy: String Trio, opening of the fourth Part.



The numbers refer to rhythmic cells recapitulated from the opening page, as in the previous Example.

Chris Dench

Chris Dench was born in London in June 1953 and, until his recent move to Siena, in Northern Italy, spent most of his life either on the southern fringes of London, or on the south coast (Dover, Southampton, Brighton). Like most of the composers considered here, he is self-taught, though he took a year of the BMus course at Southampton University in 1971. He cites the major impetus to his composing career as being a recital given by Roger Woodward which included Takahashi's *Chromamorphe II* and Scriabin's Preludes op.74; as he says, 'I went home and wrote *Helical*' (1975), a three-minute piano solo which is much the earliest of the pieces he still acknowledges. At the time he made a precarious living by running a series of record shops specialising in contemporary and classical *arcana*; his huge record collection bears witness to a continuing catholicity of taste. Another uncompleted course at City University, London, took his omnivorous intellectual appetite in other directions – semiology, ethnology and various scientific domains (he still would like to have been an astrophysicist), most of which have had a solid role to play in his subsequent compositions.

His first major performances came in 1980, when Michael Finnissy played *Topologies*, and The London Sinfonietta premiered *Kinjiki* (now retitled *Sans Soleil*). International attention came when the French Ministry of Culture commissioned *Énoncé* for the 1983 Metz Festival. Dench has an almost Boulezian propensity for withdrawing and/or revising pieces, which makes any kind of works list a hazardous undertaking. But at the moment of writing, it looks like this:

1975 *Helical*, solo piano
1977-80 *Sans Soleil*, chamber orchestra*
1978 *Lonely*, solo clarinet*
1979 *Topologies*, solo piano
1981 *Shunga*, mezzo-soprano and four instruments*
Time, solo basset- or bass-clarinet
Caught Breath of Time, solo flute
1982 *Paravents*, nine brass, and two percussion players*
1983-4 *Énoncé*, fifteen instruments
1985 *Strangeness*, string quartet*
Tilt, solo piano
1985-6 *Recueillement*, eight instruments*
1986 *Esperance*, solo piano
Venezia, solo flute
1987 *De/ployé*, solo piccolo
Afterimages, 21 players*

(* = under revision; however, all works except *Sans Soleil* may be performed in the initial versions)

Works in progress include two further flute pieces (for his wife, the Australian flautist Laura Chislett): *Acqua Alta* (for solo flute) and *Sulle Scale Della Fenice* (for flute with twelve amplified instruments).

More than most composers, Dench follows Baudelaire in asserting the artist's right to contradict himself. What follows, therefore, should not be taken as in any way definitive, but simply as a Portrait of the Artist in November 1986. Two months earlier, at the Gaudeamus Festival in Amsterdam, he had caused some perplexity at the composers' forum chaired by Klaus Huber, through his idiosyncratic use of the term 'musical archetypes'. I asked him to elaborate:

CHRIS DENCH: Well, I don't mean the same thing as Michael Finnissy, who thinks of archetypes in terms of linear and harmonic gestures – as something that is very definitely in the fabric of the music. So in *English Country Tunes* he feels he has gone back to British folk-music archetypes, which is a reasonable statement. But I'm using 'archetypes' in a way I tend to think of as being my own. It seems to me that the only reason human beings are able to communicate is because there are certain kinds of brain phenomena which are congruent throughout humanity. Whether that is to do with actual structural things, I don't know – neither, it seems, do most neuro-anatomists. However, it seems to me that there *is* a kind of ubiquity of gesture: if one thinks of a piece as being notes which are scattered through the piece, then the way the notes fall is governed by a kind of force-field – which is not the same thing as the structure (which is generally something that is dropped in, in a rather artificial exo-skeletal way) – and I tend to think of that as being the 'archetype'. It seems to me that the evidence is very strongly in favour of 'mind' being simply a description of the operating mode of the brain. Similarly, then, there must be a kind of *Gestalt* phenomenon which is not necessarily reducible to a particular location in the brain, but is the product of many locations, and can be described as the archetypic phenomenon. It means that everything we do is governed by certain underpinning and automatically generated models. What I'm saying is that if I believe that to be the case, then *that*, and not the surface, is the thing that matters in the music.

I feel music's fate ought not to be stuck in a kind of ongoing progress, because music isn't like that. I don't think that music really does move forward, I don't believe in this notion of musical history. Inevitably you are a product of your age, and it's foolhardy to pretend otherwise, but I don't believe in the current vast and rather dreary teasing-out of musical fabric to make the music interesting. I feel that the fabric is a by-product, almost a digression really. I think the great composers are the ones who not only do that well but have actually got the underlying force-fields very much under control.

RICHARD TOOP: If one accepts that, does it mean that it's something one can actually operate with? Or is it just a matter of knowing that, whatever one does on the surface, the real significance lies deeper?

CD: What I'm really saying is that it provokes in me a distrust of received musical notions of form, content, and what is musically meaningful. When someone says, 'Oh, there is enormous profundity in the way Schönberg manipulates a particular series', I look at it and say, 'But God, that's not a lot more interesting than the inside of my toaster.' There *are* very pregnant musical things, but somehow in the past two or three hundred years we seem to have gone down this false track of thinking that what is musically valid is what is derived directly, historically: that one does the same as one's teacher, only better, and that these things are meaningful. But of course, these are culturally received 'meaningfulnesses', and I would like to go back as best I can to *pre*-cultural 'meaningfulness'.

RT: Is there any concrete respect in which this affects how you actually set about writing a work?

CD: Absolutely: it means that every time I write a piece I look for a structural model *ex nihilo*. And it has to conform exactly to the notion of the piece – which is why *Tilt* (which is about pinball machines and things) is a piece about spectacular random fluctuations. *Énoncé* is a bit less pure – well, not even 'pure', because I'm a composer, not an automaton. One intervenes all the time, so inevitably Mishima's 'liquefying sensibility' gets in there and does its job. I think that first of all you come up with a conception, and then you work the thing through, and then you look for a title. And quite often, by that time, the conception has gone several major steps away from where it was to begin with, and the piece has inevitably achieved a certain distance from the origins, which are no longer relevant. So what one looks for is a title that resonates towards the music in a way that is novel, and is perhaps an additional aspect. For example, if you heard *Énoncé* without knowing it was called *Énoncé*, that would be fine, but knowing that the title itself has a symmetry which fits with the symmetry of the piece . . . and also Foucault's notion of those different degrees of truth (that there's the truth that is given, in pre-Socratic Greece, by the eminence of the utterer). In my music and Michael Finnissy's that's something you have to take as read because, unlike Ferneyhough, our musics don't have the kind of linear authentication of utterance where the second note validates the first note, and the third validates the second (the opening of *Carceri I*, where everything validates everything else retrospectively, is the most obvious example of this). Mostly, Michael and I take the stance that the fact we have written something already means that we mean it.

RT: The charts and 'maps' you work from seem, if anything, to be a way of distancing yourself from the work; of limiting the capacity for intervention.

CD: They are exactly that – that's quite right. At least, hopefully there's an equilibrium. I wouldn't want to 'erase' C. Dench, because that's all I've got to offer, really . . .

RT: Isn't there a certain masochism, then, in the preparation of these huge 'distancing' charts?

CD: It's not so much masochism as a kind of deliberately caused frustration: it's like withholding orgasm – it means that when you *do* do it, when you actually come to writing the notes, that final kind of engagement with the fabric of the thing is so much more red-hot.

Venezia, for example, was a piece I wrote in full recognition of the noise *I* like to make. There is a terrible tendency on my part, when I don't mechanise some part of the music, to write Puccini. I am basically a lyrical composer, but I want actually as a composer to do more than that. And again – because my personality is, I hope, quite strong – I can introduce quite a lot of levels of sieving, and large chunks of it still remain there. And when I hear my pieces, I know they're 'mine'; that I'm not capable of eradicating the element at all, even after sieve, after sieve, after sieve. I can still intervene at that stage and weed out the things that are distinctly *not* me. It means that everything that's left is hyper-me; not in a Nietzschean sense at all: it's a less inhibited Dench than you'd get otherwise, a rather less limited one, with more synchromesh.

RT: You cite the notion of quixotism in relation to *Tilt*. Can I ask you to digress on that subject a little?

CD: In *Tilt* the quixotism is really in the *tone* of the piece. The other kind is actually the compositional quixotism, the idea of compositionally pushing yourself further and further into this realm of no-man's land. It's a kind of adventurousness I enjoy enormously, and that's why, if my pieces fail, I gnash my teeth but I turn round and say, 'Well, dammit, I had a good go'. You know the thing was worth doing. The thing that really depresses me is when I feel that the composition has not actually 'had a go'. I can stand failure, but there's nothing I hate more than being compromised by time-pressures into not doing a piece that is authentic.

Let me go back to the notion of validation, of music which is valid simply because Michael or I have written it. I don't feel it quite as extremely as Michael. He seems to be quite happy with the idea of writing a music which simply utters – I'm sort of ambivalent about this. I like my utterances to have content as well as tone, although what often happens with my pieces is that they start off sounding as if they are completely irrational, but there *is* a certain amount of retroactive validation through the way things evolve. Another thing I like very much is to use structures which are only perceptible in hindsight – so that changes *will* occur, but too slowly for your short-term memory to pick up on them. For example, the big piano solo in *Énoncé* thins out from chords of up to six notes down to single notes, but you don't notice it until you are down to single notes or somewhere in that direction.

RT: How does this affect the second hearing? Presumably, if the thing is perceptible with hindsight, it is perceptible in advance next time one hears it?

CD: Well, I think that familiarity is the way that one gets to love a piece, because you can't love it until you are familiar with it. So it's also like getting to know people: there's a stage at which you slowly learn the secrets, and once you know the secrets you can just appreciate the skill with which they are laid out. But hopefully it takes quite a while to get to that stage, because if it doesn't – if it can be done quickly – then the piece doesn't hold any real engagement.

In *A Lover's Discourse*,[7] Barthes quotes a lovely notion, *atopos*, which he says is something 'the amorous subject ascribes to the amorous object'. And this *atopos* means 'of a ceaselessly unforeseeable originality', which is something that I strive for in my pieces; but I want that to be within a framework of consistency – 'unforeseeableness' but 'naturalness' as well.

* * *

The following analytical material will be concerned mainly with *Tilt* and *Énoncé*, partly because they are substantial pieces which I happen to admire, partly because they introduce many of the characteristic features of Dench's recent compositional method, and partly because the score format does allow for the intelligible reproduction of excerpts in reduced form (a consideration which makes the recent *Afterimages*, for instance, rather hard to deal with). First, however, I shall look at some broader stylistic and technical considerations.

Since *Tilt*, Dench's pitch processes have had a clear family relationship to the procedures of Xenakis's *Herma*. That is, the available pitch material has generally been divided up into four basic sets (in which

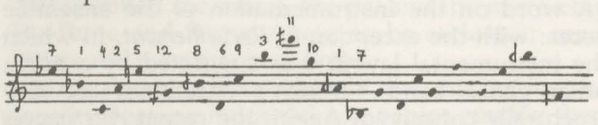
octaves are regarded as non-equivalent), and different parts of the piece, or different instrumental groupings, have been characterised by particular sets (A, B, C, D) or their various conjunctions (AB, AC, AD, BC, BD, CD – it seems likely that the last of these has a rather Schumannesque significance for the composer). The size of the sets depends, of course, on the range of the instruments used and the decision as to whether quarter-tones (if employed) are to be incorporated into the basic sets (as in *Recueillement*) or applied subsequently as inflections (*Venezia*).

If the former is the case, then conjunction sets will often contain a formidable number of notes, and the *tutti* passages in Dench's works which are based on such conjunction sets have tended to give rise to some controversy concerning their acoustic coherence (a controversy which, given the generally low standards of pitch accuracy in performances to date, is hard to resolve empirically). In recent pieces Dench has evolved a so-called 'looping technique' which allows a limited number of pitches to be systematically recycled in an unpredictable yet coherent manner. He gives Example 14 from *Afterimages* as an illustration.

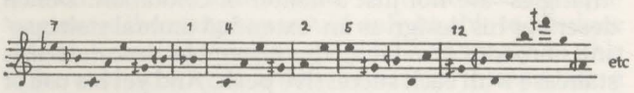
Example 14

An illustration of Dench's 'looping technique', from *Afterimages*.

The sequence:

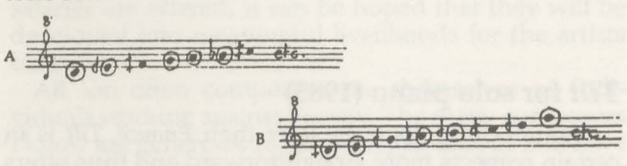


gives rise to:

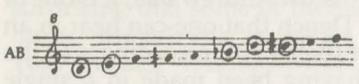


The number above each note in the upper stave implies a group of *that* number of pitches, starting with *that* note, i.e. seven notes from the first pitch, one from the second (i.e. just the second note), four from the third (C) and so forth. (♭ = flattened by a quarter-tone, ♯ = sharpened by a quarter-tone.)

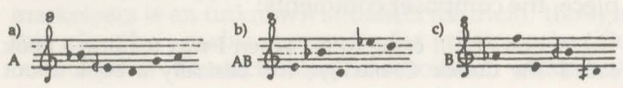
Conversely, recent pieces for solo instruments have employed means of extracting more complex pitch-groupings from the basic sets. In *Esperance* this is done by letting one hand use a transposed version of the conjunction sets, and in a preface to *De/Ployé*, Dench shows how notes drawn from two of the basic quarter-tone sets:



and their semitone composite AB (in which the quarter-tones are 'rationalised')

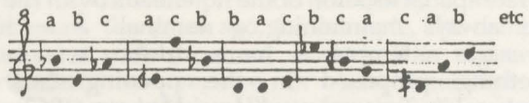


are re-ordered:



and interlocked on the basis of a permutation column:

a b c
a c b
b a c
b c a
c a b
c b a



(where *a b c* is the first note of each group, *a c b* the second note of each group etc.).

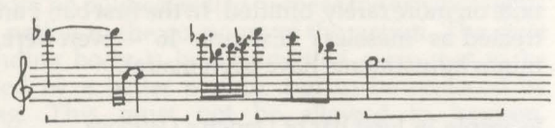
The formal use of the various simple and composite sets will be considered in more detail in the analysis of *Tilt* (below). A final general point worth making here is that, where possible, Dench likes to re-use the same basic sets in different works (thus *Esperance* and *Tilt*, for example, work with the same pitch materials):

I don't like generating new ones, because I don't know them – they're unfamiliar under the hands. And with the ones I do know, I know their registral characteristics and their harmonies. I feel I have a very serious personal investment in these harmonies: I'm getting to know them well, they're getting to be very personal.

From *Énoncé* onwards, the most striking rhythmic feature of Dench's work is the use of chains of periodic values, continually 'changing gear' through the use of irrationals in relation to the basic tempo. To some degree, as noted earlier, this is characteristic of all the composers discussed here, but with Dench it plays an especially significant role – the rhythmic structure of *Esperance*, admittedly a brief piece, is completely based on it. The right hand at the start of *Esperance* gives an untypically simple instance of the technique (Example 15). The point is, though, that usually the relationships are *not* so simple, and are not meant to be. The whole purpose of this technique is to create a multi-layered tapestry of shifting pulse-rates (or 'pseudo-tempi') whose components are at least nominally perceptible (hence the periodic rhythms). Inevitably this leads to notational difficulties: a phrase may look difficult, and be mentally hard to 'place', even though the actual notes are physically quite easy to play. The composer is well aware of this fact and concerned about it. In a BBC feature on the 'New Complexity' he commented:

Notationally I have reached a point of a certain amount of redundancy, and I am striving to do something about that, but my perception of pieces that have been notated much more loosely has always been one of inarticulacy. I don't want to release control of the rhythmic life of the piece.

Example 15



Basic values (in ♪.):	3	1	2	4
No. of attacks:	2	4	3	1

The opening of Chris Dench's *Esperance* (right hand only).
This shows various numbers of periodic attacks fitted into various 'basic values'.

The solution, in recent works, has not been a simplification of the musical substance but an attempt to make the score itself more 'user-friendly', or at least less visually intimidating. In *Esperance* this takes two forms: the use of 'prolation signs' which remove one level of irrationals (e.g. $\frac{5}{6}$ indicates that until the next such sign, five notes in the right hand have the same duration as six in the left), and meticulously accurate spatial location of the noteheads (with the left hand always maintaining a nominal ♪ = 120). *Afterimages* attempts a more drastic version of something proposed in the opening bars of Lutoslawski's *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux* (1963): the conductor gives large downbeats, which are interpreted by the players in terms of individually differing time-signatures (or, in Dench's case, differing tempi).

There are other rhythmic processes, of course, some of which involve statistical movements from long to short values, or vice-versa. In *Afterimages* and particularly in *De/Ployé* there is also a tendency towards more complex internal sculpting of individual phrases. The opening bar of *De/Ployé* gives a clear example of the rather arcane means by which such rhythms are procured. The piece is based on the name of its dedicatee, the flautist Roberto Fabbriciani; or, more exactly, the second part is based on *Roberto*, and the first on *Fabbriciani* (modified to Fababriciani). The durations are based on the letter-numbers of each name (A=1, B=2, C=3 etc.), formed into permutation squares and, in order to vary the ratio between the longest and shortest values, subjected to a sliding scale which imposes varying degrees of 'flattening'.

The following diagram, referring to the seven letters (A, B, C, F, I, N, R) in the name Fabbriciani, is adapted from Dench's sketches:

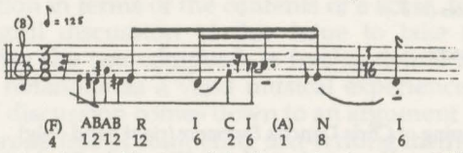
A	B	C	F	I	N	R
1	2	3	6	9	14	18
1	2	3	6	9	13	17
1	2	3	6	8	12	16
1	2	3	5	8	11	15
1	2	3	5	7	10	14
1	2	3	5	7	9	13
1	2	2	4	6	8	12

etc.

The last line shown above (which Dench calls 'gradient twelve', since twelve is the largest number occurring in it) is the one used in the first bar of *De/Ployé*. The actual rhythmic values depend on the length of the bar within which the name is lodged, which in turn derives from the name Fabbriciani (thus at the opening, F = 6♪ = 3/8, A = 1♪ = 1/16 etc).

For practical purposes, any duration which would come out at less than one fourteenth of a second is regarded as 'massless', and either shown as a grace-note or, more rarely, omitted. In the first bar, 1 and 2 are treated as 'massless' (Example 16 – even here, some minor adjustments have been made).

Example 16 First bar of Dench's *De/Ployé*.



This illustrates the application of the letters in the name Fabbriciani to the durations.

Again, further aspects of rhythmic treatment will emerge in the analyses of *Énoncé* and *Tilt*.

Dench's approach to form is, as implicit in the interview earlier, harder to codify. Generally, though, one could probably distinguish between 'grand forms', where Dench works 'down' from a broadly conceived architecture, and 'local forms', where he works 'up' from a number of similar building blocks. Examples of the 'grand form' would be the broad arch-form of *Énoncé*, *Tilt* (with its rather cinematic cross-cuts between five basic materials) and, above all, the current (first) version of *Afterimages* (with its 'six peaks, each of less intensity than its predecessor, each slower to begin and end:

$$8\times\tfrac{3}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{7}{8},\quad 7\times\tfrac{4}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{9}{8},\quad 6\times\tfrac{5}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{11}{8},$$
$$5\times\tfrac{6}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{13}{8},\quad 4\times\tfrac{7}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{15}{8},\quad 3\times\tfrac{8}{8}\rightarrow\tfrac{17}{8}.$$ [8]

Examples of 'local forms', on the other hand, would include *Recueillement* (with its 23 metrically identical 'frames' of 6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 ♩.) and *De/Ployé* (with its assemblage of twelve *Fab(a)bricianis* and seven *Robertos*). It should be emphasised, though, that the kinds of 'sections' invoked here are not just static blocks: the vast majority are in 'unsteady state', (that is, they are articulated by clear tendencies in register, density, dynamic, instrumentation, or some combination of these).

A word on the instrumentation of the ensemble pieces: with the exception of *Recueillement*, in which 'the instrumental layout was suggested by a north Indian ghazal band',[9] Dench's ensembles are very structurally conceived. Again, the recent *Afterimages* provides a sort of *locus classicus* (Example 17). The additional instruments within the wind and brass 'triangles' are not just a matter of coloration: Dench describes his design as an 'extended timbral staircase' and, broadly speaking, the ensemble descends this staircase with each successive peak. And yet his use of these instruments is relatively austere: after *Énoncé* there have been almost no trills or even string *pizzicati and, apart from* some fluttertongues at the opening and artificial harmonics at the end, *Afterimages* totally eschews idiomatic instrumental 'effects'. *Recueillement* allows the bass clarinet a few trills and flutter-tonguings, and the double-bass some harmonics and *pizzicati*; otherwise the treatment of the ensemble is of monastic severity.

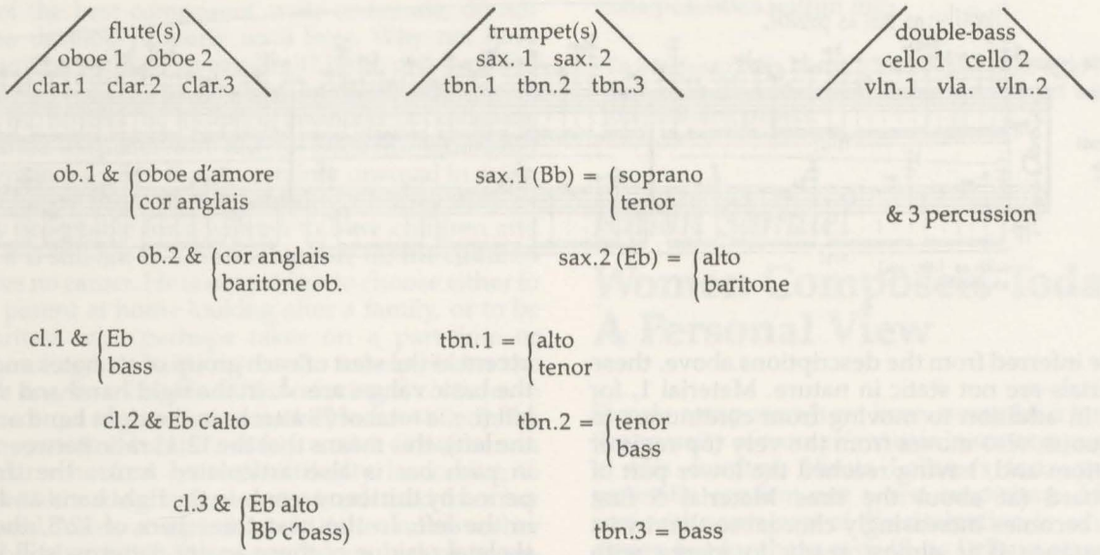
Nevertheless, the creation of distinctive small instrumental groupings as structural elements has been typical of the ensemble works since *Énoncé*; examples of their use are given below.

Tilt for solo piano (1985)

Though chronologically later than *Énoncé*, *Tilt* is in certain respects more straightforward and thus offers a simpler path into the details of Dench's working methods. In passing, one should also comment that, thanks to the efforts of pianist Andrew Ball, it is one of the very few works by Dench that one can hear in an exemplary performance (Ball's BBC recording is all the more remarkable for having been made in a single 'take', without editing). On the origins and title of the piece, the composer comments:

The notion of *Tilt* came to me when I was reading a book called *The Cosmic Connection*; it's basically a book about

Example 17 Instrumentation for *Afterimages*



quantum physics and sub-atomic particles and the cosmos. In the middle of this book there's a chapter on randomness, in which he describes how at the very centre of the known world, in the centre of Jerusalem, there's this very ancient building in which, presumably, the Christian Church first started up, and it's now a pinball alley. So here we are in the heart of the world – in the heart of the universe, if you like – and in the middle of it there is a pinball machine. And the author comments that the art of the future will be an art of randomness.

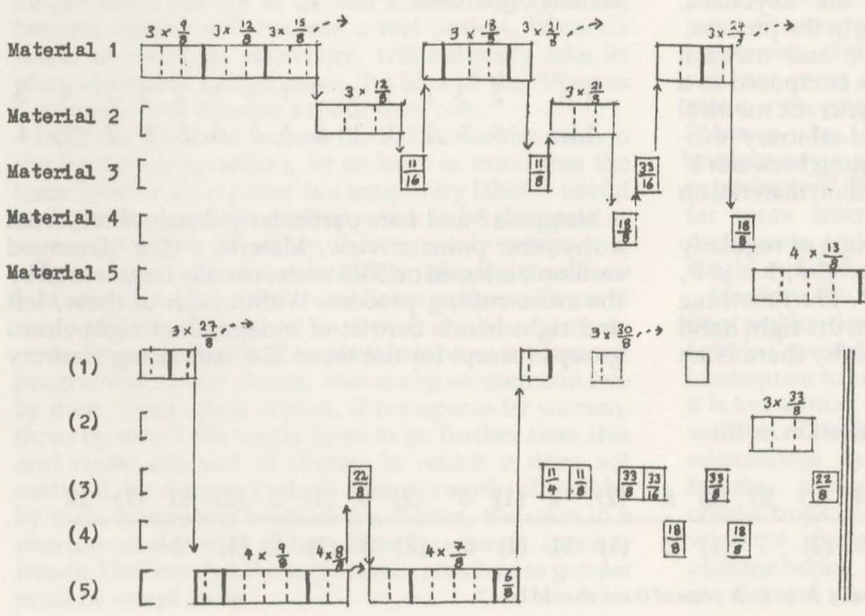
And there's the notion of quixotism, and very difficult piano music (Paul Griffiths described it as 'Don Quixote at the pinball table', which is about right) – of tilting at windmills combined with tilt on a pinball machine. And quixotism combined with the notion of geophysical tilt, where you get sudden changes in the strata of a landscape: that's quite a strong image in *Tilt*. There is no 'drama' in *Tilt*: there are all kinds of interesting juxtapositions.

An overall scheme for *Tilt* is shown in Example 18. Essentially, the piece cross-cuts five kinds of music.

The life-line throughout the piece is supplied by the opening material, which begins as a continuous two-part texture and soon acquires two additional layers while also becoming progressively more fragmented. If we call this Material 1, then the remaining materials, in order of appearance are:

Material 2: brusque chords, marked 'impassive, brutal';
Material 3: wild chains of chords, marked 'like a deranged carillon';
Material 4: presents the four '*ur*-sets' on which the pitches of *Tilt* are based – the first and third are delicate, the second and fourth extremely aggressive;
Material 5: two-part 'melodies', at first 'murmuring and hazy', but becoming increasingly athletic and animated. This material dominates the middle part of the work.

Example 18 Form-scheme for *Tilt*.



This shows the cross-cutting between the five materials, and the metrical schemes associated with each. Heavy lines show the end of each bar-sequence (e.g. 3 × 9/8), dotted lines show the bars within each sequence. Where a sequence is broken by the cross-cutting to another material, an arrow indicates that the sequence will be resumed at the next occurrence of the 'interrupted' material.

Example 17 Instrumentation for *Afterimages*

flute(s)
oboe 1 oboe 2
clar.1 clar.2 clar.3

trumpet(s)
sax. 1 sax. 2
tbn.1 tbn.2 tbn.3

double-bass
cello 1 cello 2
vln.1 vla. vln.2

ob.1 & { oboe d'amore / cor anglais

ob.2 & { cor anglais / baritone ob.

cl.1 & { Eb / bass

cl.2 & Eb c'alto

cl.3 & { Eb alto / Bb c'bass)

sax.1 (Bb) = { soprano / tenor

sax.2 (Eb) = { alto / baritone

& 3 percussion

tbn.1 = { alto / tenor

tbn.2 = { tenor / bass

tbn.3 = bass

quantum physics and sub-atomic particles and the cosmos. In the middle of this book there's a chapter on randomness, in which he describes how at the very centre of the known world, in the centre of Jerusalem, there's this very ancient building in which, presumably, the Christian Church first started up, and it's now a pinball alley. So here we are in the heart of the world – in the heart of the universe, if you like – and in the middle of it there is a pinball machine. And the author comments that the art of the future will be an art of randomness.

And there's the notion of quixotism, and very difficult piano music (Paul Griffiths described it as 'Don Quixote at the pinball table', which is about right) – of tilting at windmills combined with tilt on a pinball machine. And quixotism combined with the notion of geophysical tilt, where you get sudden changes in the strata of a landscape: that's quite a strong image in *Tilt*. There is no 'drama' in *Tilt*: there are all kinds of interesting juxtapositions.

An overall scheme for *Tilt* is shown in Example 18. Essentially, the piece cross-cuts five kinds of music. The life-line throughout the piece is supplied by the opening material, which begins as a continuous two-part texture and soon acquires two additional layers while also becoming progressively more fragmented. If we call this Material 1, then the remaining materials, in order of appearance are:

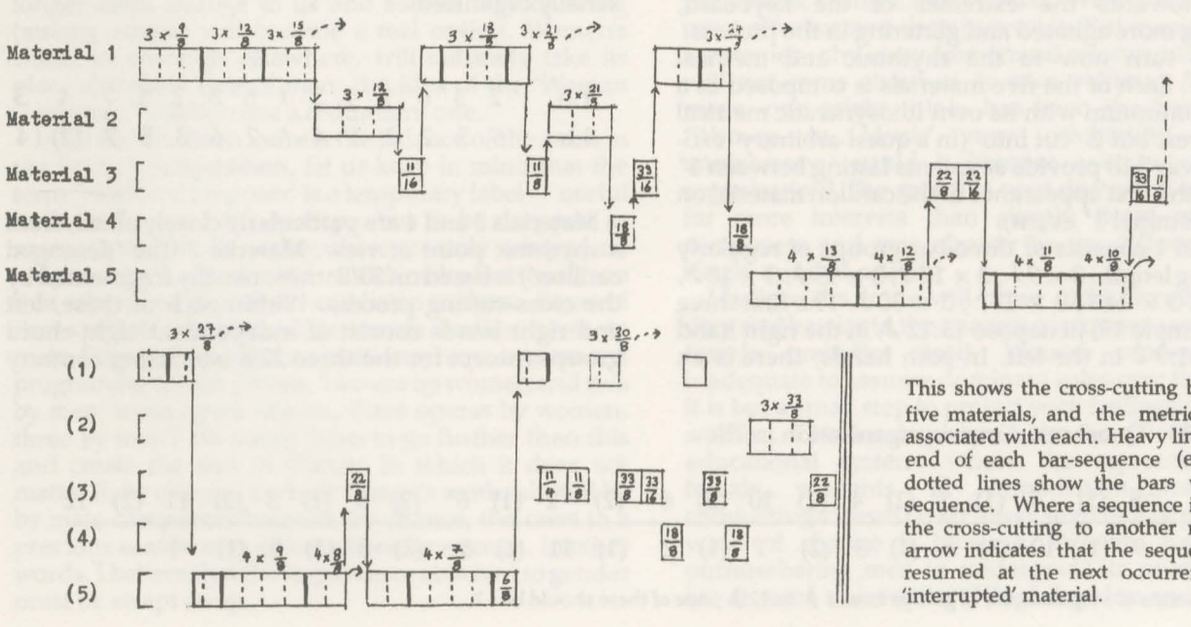
Material 2: brusque chords, marked 'impassive, brutal';

Material 3: wild chains of chords, marked 'like a deranged carillon';

Material 4: presents the four '*ur*-sets' on which the pitches of *Tilt* are based – the first and third are delicate, the second and fourth extremely aggressive;

Material 5: two-part 'melodies', at first 'murmuring and hazy', but becoming increasingly athletic and animated. This material dominates the middle part of the work.

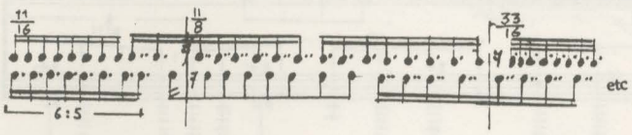
Example 18 Form-scheme for *Tilt*.



This shows the cross-cutting between the five materials, and the metrical schemes associated with each. Heavy lines show the end of each bar-sequence (e.g. 3 × 9/8), dotted lines show the bars within each sequence. Where a sequence is broken by the cross-cutting to another material, an arrow indicates that the sequence will be resumed at the next occurrence of the 'interrupted' material.

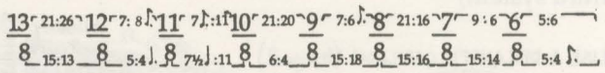
motion, which have nine-chord groups). Example 21 shows the structure of the first (divided) 33/8. Material 4 operates in almost exactly the same way, but with groups of four chords and a constant bar length of 18/8.

Example 21



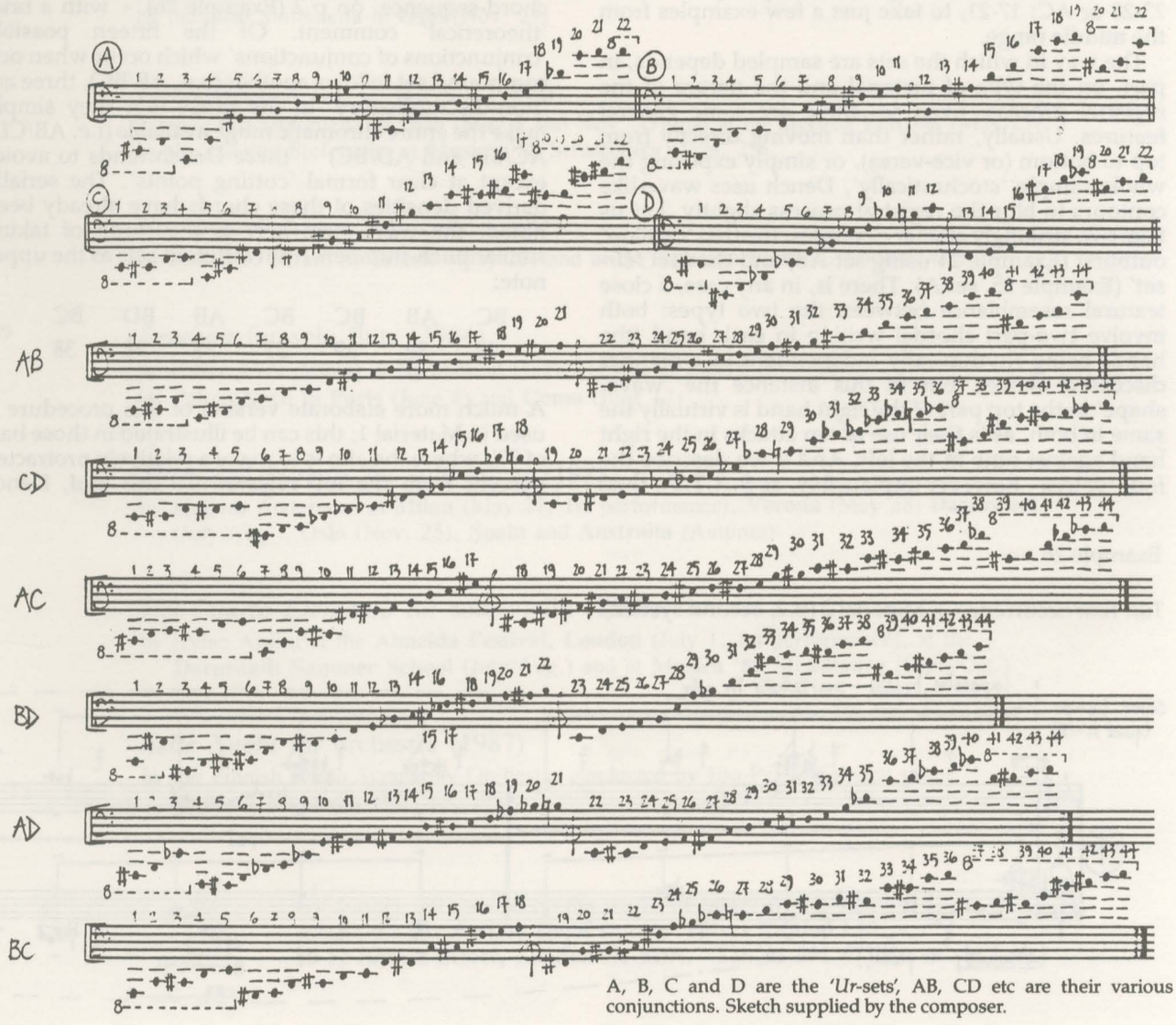
Material 5 is in many ways a mirror image of Material 1. The latter was based on three-bar units of increasing length; Material 5 is based on four-bar units of *decreasing* length: 4 × 13♪, 4 × 12♪, 4 × 11♪, 4 × 10♪, 4 × 9♪, 4 × 8♪, 4 × 7♪, 4 × 6♪ etc. The within-the-bar procedures of this material are the most complex in the whole of *Tilt* (in many respects they provide an upbeat to *Esperance*). Each bar has a different irrational subdivision for left and right hands, the left hand based on fives and the right hand on sevens (these irrationals remain constant for each four-bar group). The subdivisions are given in Example 22.

Example 22



Finally, a few comments on the pitch structure of *Tilt*. The theoretical basis of the piece is the division of the 88 notes of the keyboard into four sets, and their six conjunctions (AB, AC etc), as shown in Example 23. Before looking at samples of the ways in which the sets are deployed, a few general observations can be made. Firstly the groups are, of necessity, large (22 notes in each source set, and 44 – i.e. half the notes on the keyboard – in each conjunction) but, apart from the four sections that present the '*Ur*-sets', there is no attempt to present a whole set at once; rather, as part of a general movement in register, particular parts of a set are 'sampled' (there *are* more complex procedures, which will be touched on later) and given that even the conjunction sets have, on average, only six notes within each octave, there is plenty of scope for particular registers to acquire a distinctive harmonic colour.

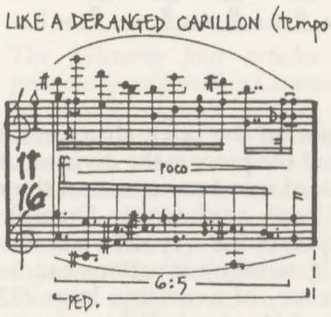
Example 23 Pitch-groups for *Tilt* (also used for *Esperance*).



A, B, C and D are the '*Ur*-sets', AB, CD etc are their various conjunctions. Sketch supplied by the composer.

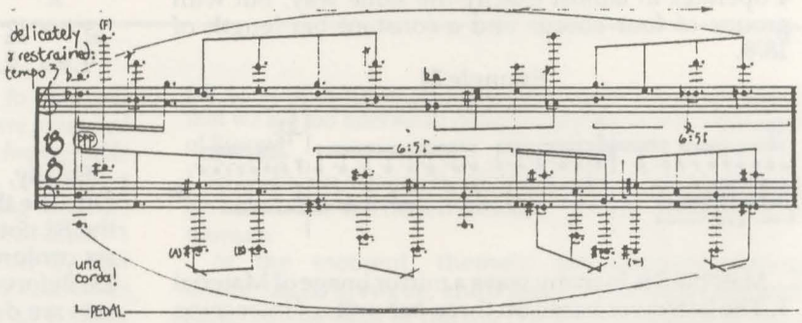
Example 24

Tilt: first occurrence of Material 3, using set AB (p.2, third system)



Example 25

Tilt: Ur-set A (p.4, fourth system).



Note how closely the contour of the top voice matches that of the previous Example.

In principle, the elements of A,B,C and D are, for each set, spread across the entire keyboard range; but in practice, there are idiosyncratic 'gaps' in each. Thus A has only three notes in the top two octaves; B largely avoids the octave above middle C; C has almost nothing in the bass-clef range, and D has a gap of one and a half octaves above C''. Thus even the conjunction sets can have quite distinct characteristics in certain ranges, such as the diatonic patches in AB: 21-29 and BD: 22-29, or pentatonic groups like CD: 23-28 or AC: 17-21, to take just a few examples from the middle range.

The way in which the sets are sampled depends, in part, on the type of material and the nature of the registral process. Even so, there are some general features. Usually, rather than moving directly from top to bottom (or vice-versa), or simply exposing the whole sample 'stochastically', Dench uses wave-like contours to blur the registral process slightly. Let us take two strikingly similar examples: the first 'carillon' outburst (Example 24 using set AB) and the first '*Ur*-set' (Example 25, set A). There is, in any case, a close textural resemblance between the two types: both involve two-part chordal writing in each hand (the hands being rhythmically independent in a manner discussed above), but in this instance the 'wave-shape' in the top part of the right hand is virtually the same in both, as is their use of ten attacks in the right hand against nine in the left. And if we describe the four 'voices', however implausibly, as S.A.T.B., then in both cases there is a kind of 'sampling width', and the same marginal overlap between voices:

AB	S.	44 → 37	A	S.	22 → 17
	A.	38 → 32		A.	17 → 12
	T.	32 → 16		T.	12 → 8
	B.	27 → 21		B.	8 → 1

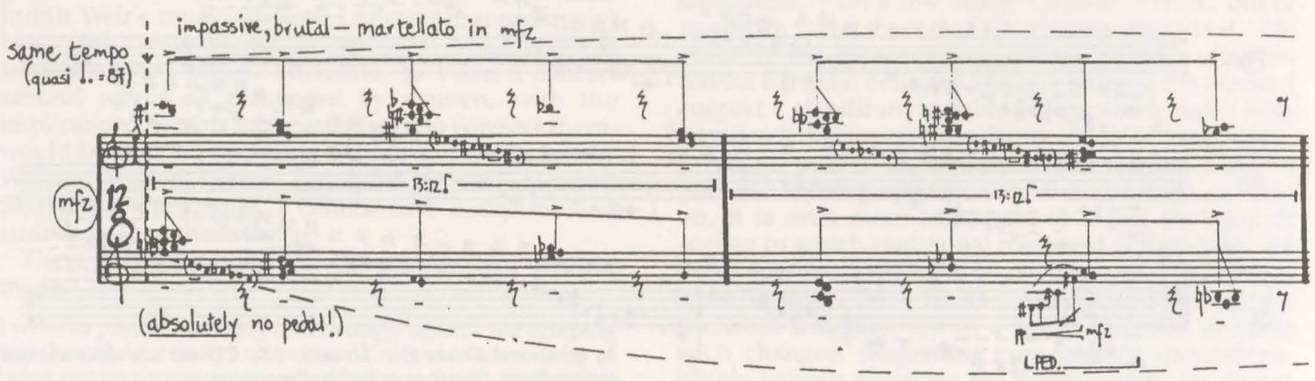
Other types (e.g. the Material 2 chords) alternate between conjunctions from chord to chord. Here again, I shall precede a simple example – the first chord-sequence, on p.2 (Example 26) – with a brief 'theoretical' comment. Of the fifteen possible 'conjunctions of conjunctions' which occur when one compound set follows another (e.g. AB/BC), three are 'non-discriminatory' in the sense that they simply make the entire chromatic range available (i.e. AB/CD, AC/BD and AD/BC) – these Dench tends to avoid, except at clear formal 'cutting points'. The serially derived densities of these chords have already been noted; the wave-form here is the result of taking similar pitch-numbers from different sets as the upper note:

BC	AB	BC	BC	AB	BD	BC	etc
40	39	39	37	38	38	38	

A much more elaborate version of this procedure is used in Material 1; this can be illustrated in those bars of *Tilt* where the aim is to make a relatively protracted descent from the top register. To this end, Dench

Example 26

Tilt: first occurrence of Material 2 (p.2, second system)



cross-cuts *note by note* from one set to another, moving one step further down each set for each group (this does not apply to the accented notes, which form a separate 'skein': always CD for the right hand, and BC for the left). For the first three groups in each hand, this can be systematized as shown in Example 27.

Example 27 Cross-cutting procedures in *Tilt*

Right hand:

CD:41	CD:44	AC:41	AB:43	CD:35*	AD:42	, then
CD:43	CD:43	AC:40	AB.42	AB.39	AD.41	, then
CD:38	CD:42	AC:39	AB:41	AB:38	AD:40	

Left hand:

BC:29	BC:28	AC:29	AB:31	AC:26	AD:30	, then
BC:32	BC:27	AC:28	AB:30	AC:25	AD:29	, then
BC:31	BC:26	AC:27	AB:29	AC:24	AD:28	

* By the system, this should be AB:40; Dench says 'In *Tilt* I recall making "errors", mostly to make the line less jerky, more "pianistic".'

Arbitrary as the procedure may seem in some ways, I find that it leads to extremely striking and memorable results like virtually everything else in the piece. Dench is inclined to be slightly disparaging about *Tilt*, finding it 'shallow' in comparison to works like *Énoncé* and *Afterimages*. That seems to me rather unjust. Perhaps, compared to those other pieces, it is less 'committed', less 'personally emotive' (at one level, one could take it as a memory of the decisive Woodward concert: a sort of *Chromamorphe III*), but it also strikes me as being a remarkably successful and distinctive contribution to the new piano repertoire.

Énoncé (1983 – definitive revision 1984)

Although Chris Dench now regards *Afterimages* as signalling the arrival of 'the authentic Dench voice, only slightly distorted by lack of time', its predecessor *Énoncé* already establishes some clear expectations. Notably these include a plurality of musics within the one work, the large-scale application of fade-out and build-up processes, the systematic incorporation of quarter-tones in the melodic/harmonic structure (in *Shunga* they were largely confined to the vocal line), and a range of overtly extra-musical influences. Above all, though, it is the piece in which he first embraces the more general idea of the 'big statement' (doubtless one of the many implications of the title itself).

Dench likes to attach the three following, suitably pluralist quotations to the work:

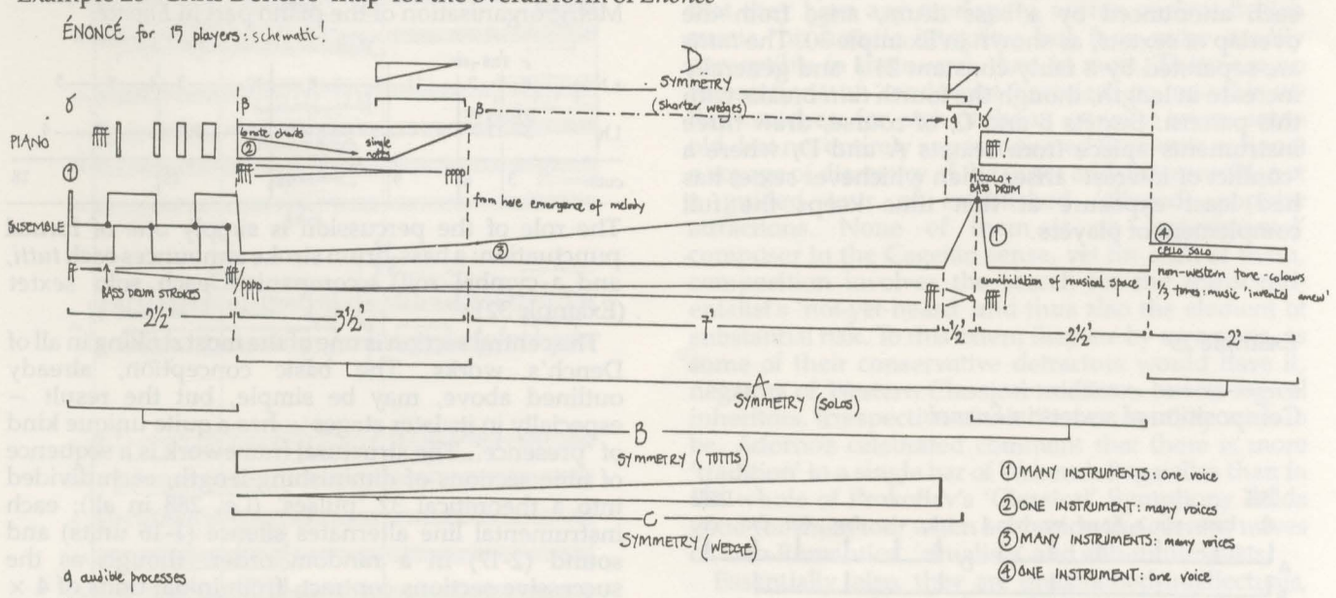
> In Greece, even as late as the 6th century BC, the truth – and power – of discourse resided, not in *what* was said, but in *who* said it and *how* it was said. A century later the highest truth resided, not in what discourse *was* or in what it *did*, but in what it *said*. To use Foucault's distinction, truth had moved from the enunciation (*énonciation*), the ritualised act, to the statement (*énoncé*), to its meaning and to its reference to the world.
>
> Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault – the Will to Truth*

> . . . you endeavour to make communicable sense out of natural order . . . you make government and Art, and realise that they are, must be, both the same . . .
>
> Edward Albee, *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf*

> The main thing a musician would like to do is to give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe.
>
> John Coltrane (quoted by Ralph J. Gleason)

The first of these, however crucial, needs to be seen fairly equivocally. In the interview above, Dench invokes the 6th-century version ('the fact that we have written something already means we mean it') but, by its very title, *Énoncé* adopts the alternative stance. By way of mediation, perhaps, he says (referring to the four basic categories at the bottom right of his 'map' of the work – see Example 28), 'there's a kind of saturation-definition of the notion of utterance there, and that's really why the piece is called *Énoncé*.'

Example 28 Chris Dench's 'map' for the overall form of *Énoncé*



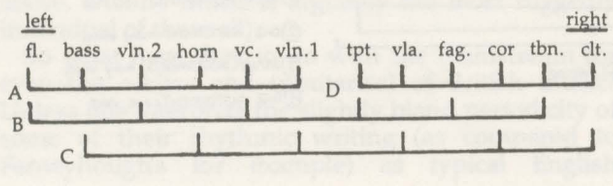
The composer's map permits a quick overview of the various symmetries and wedges which constitute the work. The outer pillars are formed by two dense *tuttis*, each followed by a solo which is underlaid by a sort of residual 'hum' from the preceding *tutti* – the first solo is for piano, the second for cello. The two solos, however, are utterly opposed in character: the piano solo is a grand virtuoso outburst over the whole range of the instrument which gradually reduces from six-note chords to single notes, and then trails off into the upper range of the instrument. The cello solo, on the contrary, has a quiet, introverted intensity – if the piano solo loosely evokes Xenakis, the one for cello is more like a 'homage to Scelsi' – which becomes slightly more animated as it proceeds. Both deviate from the quarter-tone norm of the work – the piano solo throughout being, inevitably, semitonal (as an emblem of 'The West'), while the cello uses third-tones, and in the words of the score's preface 'should sound very ''non-Western'' '. The *tuttis* too are quite distinct in character, the first being more obviously 'sectionalised' by the juxtaposition and overlap of various sextets within the ensemble, while the second is exuberantly chaotic in a rather Ivesian manner (*Tone Roads 3* comes to mind); the composer describes it as being 'rather like the electric light-bulbs in the Pepsi ad in Piccadilly Circus: lots of bright lights that flash around randomly'.

The central part of the work is another extended *tutti* that gradually emerges underneath the piano solo, and proceeds inexorably to a climax for another seven and a half minutes. At first the other instruments are silent, then they take up low held notes, and gradually build up ever longer chains of ascending pitches until, one by one, they are 'unlocked' from simple rising sequences, and become ever more diverse and active. Suddenly, the entire ensemble clicks into a high-speed re-run of the ascending passages (an 'ascent into heaven', as Dench puts it), before being unleashed on the second *tutti* proper.

Let us look now in a little more detail at the individual sections. The first *tutti*, as indicated above, arises from four sextets, selected from all the players except the pianist and two percussionists, and reflecting their seating positions: two 'close' sextets, and two 'spread' ones (Example 29). The *tutti* sections, each announced by a bass drum, arise from the overlap of sextets, as shown in Example 30. The *tuttis* are separated by a fairly constant 21 ♩ and generally increase in length, though the fourth *tutti* breaks with this pattern. Sextets B and C, of course, draw three instruments apiece from sextets A and D; where a 'conflict of interest' arises, then whichever sextet has had least exposure at that time keeps the full complement of players.

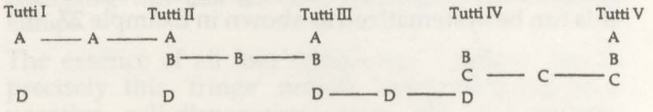
Example 29

Composition of sextets in *Énoncé*



Example 30

Overlapping of sextets in the *tuttis* of *Énoncé*

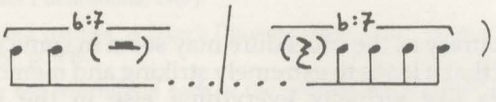


Each of the tuttis and interludes has a clear overall dynamic profile:

Tutti I	*ff* > *mf*
A	*mf* < *f*
Tutti II	*f cresc.*
B	*mf* < *ff*
Tutti III	*ff cresc.*
D	*f* < *fff*
Tutti IV	*fff cresc.*
C	*ff* < *ffff*
Tutti V	*ffff*

Within the sextets, each instrument operates separately in terms of register (four different 'bandwidths' in the composer's words) and rhythm, the latter governed by a 'pulse-flow matrix' which determines how many notes are played within how long a basic duration (these are calculated 'seamlessly' for each instrument, so that when a particular sextet re-enters, it picks up at the previous cut-off point.

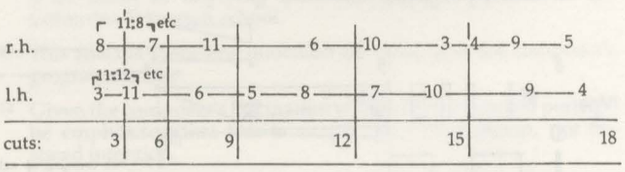
e.g.



The piano and percussion operate independently of these schemes. The piano part is composed as a continuous chain of values increasing from 3 ♪ to 11 ♪ (i.e. 63 ♪ in all), with each basic value divided into eleven, and the values separately ordered for right and left hand. The result is 'chopped' at intervals of 3 + 6 + 9 + 12 + 15 + 18 = 63 ♪, and the six 'cuts' of increasing length are, in Dench's words, 'distributed irregularly' throughout the whole *tutti* (Example 31).

Example 31

Metric organisation of the piano part in *Énoncé*

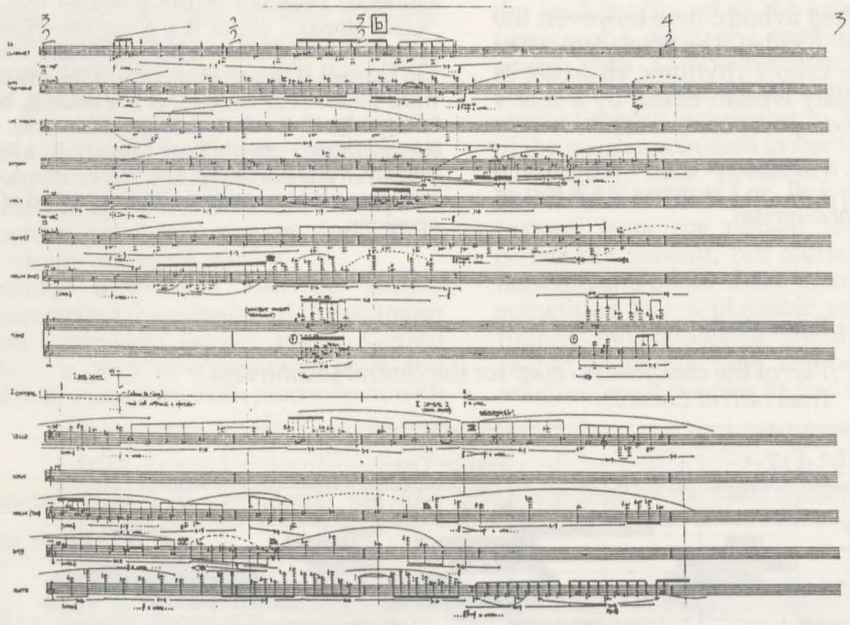


The role of the percussion is simply one of formal punctuation: a bass-drum stroke announces each *tutti*, and a cymbal roll accompanies each solo sextet (Example 32).

The central section is one of the most striking in all of Dench's works. The basic conception, already outlined above, may be simple, but the result – especially in its later stages – has a quite unique kind of 'presence'. The structural framework is a sequence of nine sections of diminishing length, each divided into a theoretical 32 'pulses' (i.e. 288 in all); each instrumental line alternates silence (1-16 units) and sound (2-17) in a random order, though as the successive sections contract, from initial units of 4 × 11/8 down to 4 × 3/8 the sound/silence ratios contract accordingly. The extraordinary character of the section

Example 32

Dench: *Énoncé* (p.3).

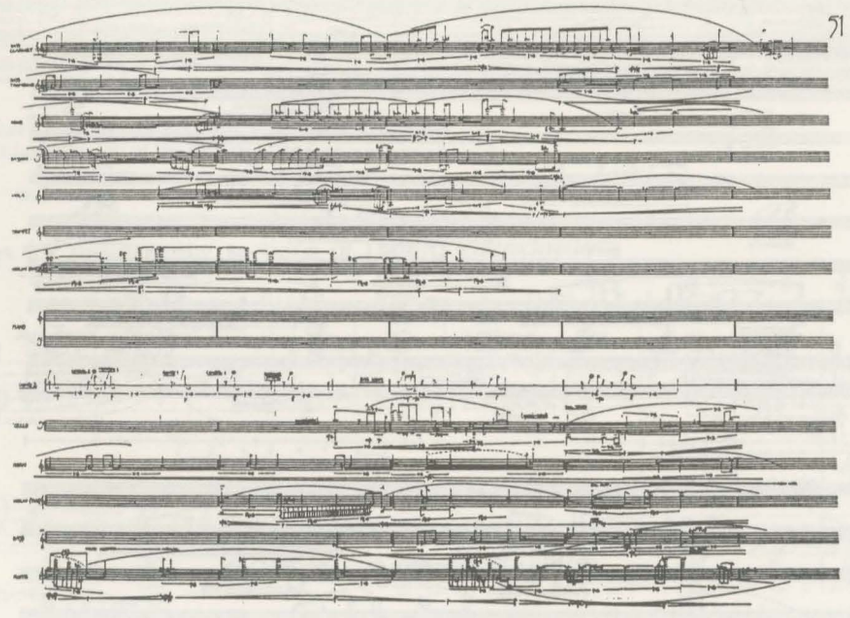


Note in particular the entry of Sextet D, signalled by the bass drum, and the first two 'cuts' of the piano material.

arises from two drastically simple decisions: firstly, each instrument has one note at its first entry, two at the second, three at the third, and so forth. Secondly, each instrument enters in its lowest register, and its materials consist of ascending scale patterns, each starting-note being slightly higher than its previous one. Given that, at the outset, the held notes are very long and the ensemble includes a bass clarinet, bass trombone, cor anglais, contrabassoon, cello, bass, horn and bass flute, the results are magnificently lugubrious. However, as the overall process gains momentum, and the instruments are gradually freed from their scale patterns, the music gains an almost Bergian intensity (not unlike the slow movement of the Chamber Concerto, in fact, with *its* ever more rapidly ascending scales). Towards the end of this section the instruments have risen to a medium-high register and included various additional figurations: grace-note groups, trills and measured tremolos (see Example 33). The dense second *tutti*, coming after the

Example 33

A passage from towards the end of the central section of *Énoncé* (p.51).



Almost all instruments (though not the bass trombone, horn and bass) have broken out of the initial ascending pitch model, and acquired additional 'decorative' elements – trills, tremolos etc.

'ascent into heaven' (see above), almost exactly reproduces the structure of the long central section, so that the part of the composer's 'map' shown in Example 34 can be applied to both; here however, the basic unit is a consistent ♪ pulse. The piano returns to the ensemble, and the cello's rhythmic structure is taken over, with curiously Ivesian effect, by a ship's bell (Example 35). The composer comments:

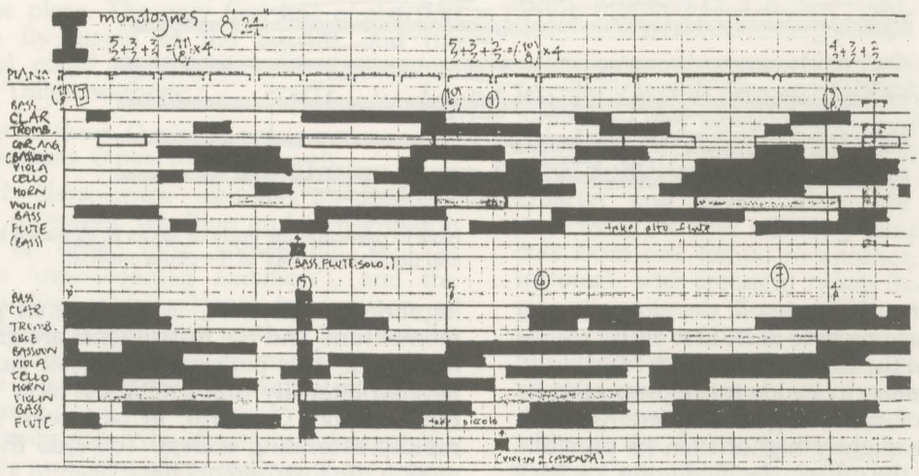
The ship's bell, I suppose, is a reference to my father, who is a sailor. We don't get on well, so I suppose it's a sort of palliative gesture, a kind of exorcism . . .

And of the concluding cello solo, he says:

It's a 'voice from another world', emerging from the catharctic overload of the previous five pages. After the 'super-climax', which is a complete wiping-out of musical space – 'annihilation' is the word I like – the only thing that can happen is this re-inventing of the musical texture, using third tones. I like to think of the ending, before the cello, as being a kind of white-out, or yellow-out. A Scriabinesque, joyous thing – that's how I regard it: a kind of outburst of ecstasy, a plateau of joy. You can't come down from it, so the only thing that can come after it is a kind of voice of intimacy speaking.

Example 34

Part of the composer's 'map' for the central section and final *tutti* of *Énoncé*.

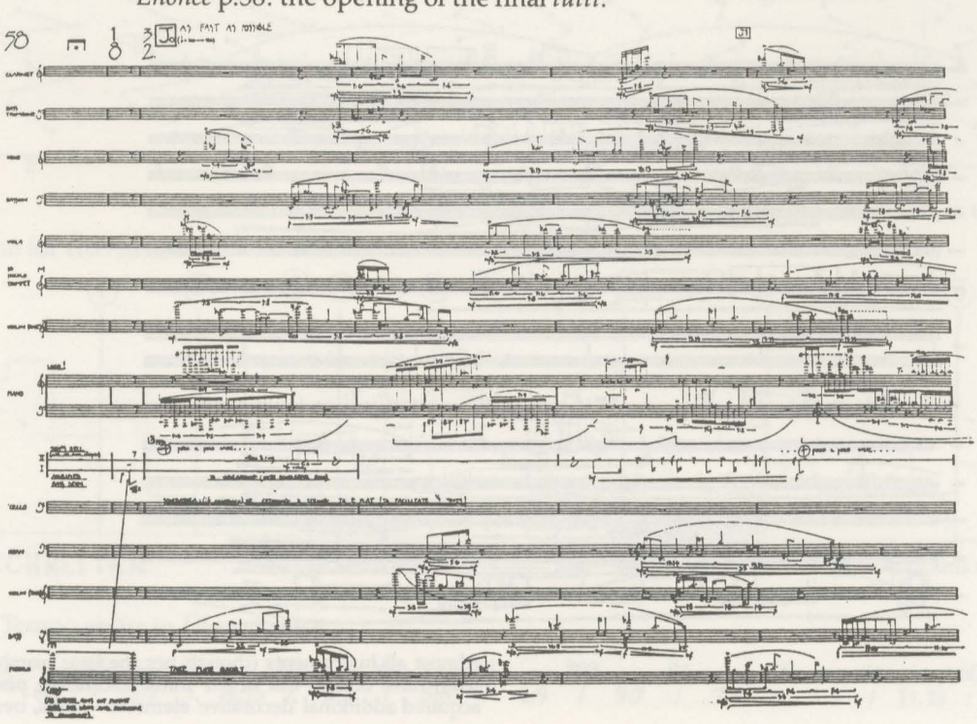


NB 'cello = ~~ships bell~~

For the *tutti* (cf. also the next Example), the scale of the map is one square = one quaver. Note that many of the verbal annotations apply only to the central section. The original uses several colours, but these, again, refer mainly to the central section. Some instrumentations have been interchanged.

Example 35

Énoncé p.58: the opening of the final *tutti*.



Richard Barrett

At the Darmstadt Summer School in 1986, Barrett began his presentation thus:

By way of introduction, I should point out that the processes by which I am beginning to define my compositional and paracompositional aims are necessarily at an early stage. (My involvement with composition began six years ago; fortunately or otherwise there still seems to be a great deal to do.)

In fact, with the exception of a short piano piece (*Invention 6*), all the works Barrett now acknowledges have been written since 1983. The first two works to attract widespread attention were *Essay in Radiance*, and more particularly *Coïgitum*, both premièred during February 1984. Both pieces had a clear 'Finnissy-circle' ambience and impressed, perhaps, mainly on account of the intransigence with which the musical ideas were pursued rather than through their assertion of a 'new voice'. It seems to me, though, that since *Anatomy*, a new voice *has* emerged, and it is a very striking one – wild, but hard-edged, using post-Xenakis compositional strategies to recapture, among other things, some of the 'chance encounters' typical of the free improvisation in which Barrett has also engaged as a guitarist. *Anatomy* broke something of a drought in the wake of *Coïgitum*; since then works have begun to come at a fairly rapid rate. As the composer puts it:

I seem currently to be involved in a spate of (for me) unprecedented, quite frightening, fecundity, which I was desperately predicting for myself at the time of the protracted inward gazing and research of 1983-84 but never really believed.

To date Barrett's main works are:

1982 *Invention 6*, solo piano
1982/4 *Principia*, male voice and piano
1983/4 *Essay in Radiance*, seven or eight players*
1984/5 *Coïgitum*, four instruments and mezzo-soprano
1986 *Anatomy*, eleven instruments
Ne songe plus à fuir, solo cello
1987 *Temptation*, five instruments and live electronics
Alba, bassoon and live electronics
Illuminer le temps, eight players
nothing elsewhere, solo viola

*One or two players may perform the percussion part.

If optimistic artworks of substance are hard to come by these days, there are at least composers who, like Dench and Finnissy, seem to espouse the 'principle of Hope'. The search for joy through art plays much less of a role in the music of Dillon and Ferneyhough, and next to none in Barrett's (the derisive ending of *Temptation* is a sort of frontal attack on what Anouilh used to call *'le sale bonheur'*). Both the basic precepts of the *Fictions* series, and the actual list of authors referred to, make this evident:

RICHARD TOOP: Can I ask you about the *Fictions* series?
RICHARD BARRETT: Basically, it's to do with externalising, and making into a compositional determinant, something which I have understood as being part of my compositional make-up for some time. That is, that music is fiction: that it proceeds from fictions which are necessary for the personality of the composer to believe, to make acts of faith in order to carry the work through. One can put this in banal terms as the belief that there will be a work of music at the end of it, and that it will be written down, will be played, will be apprehended or even understood, which, of course, are things we can't rely on. It is also not possible to rely on the validity of the precepts that go into the work, or their communicability, or anything like that. And there is also this feeling that the compositional process is one of gradual interference in, and betrayal of, something which may have been quite beautiful to start with - often not, of course. And the idea behind the *Fiction* series (beside its having various lines out to other disciplines) is that works have their psychological structure, their inner drama, in some way rooted in that process. And the process not only occurs in 'composition time', but is also dramatised in real time.

Another reason for choosing that name as the binding factor between the various works is the literary aspect of it: the Beckett, Lautréamont, Flaubert, and – later on – many other literary figures that I've been involved with (such as Robert Pinget, Ezra Pound and one or two others) – it's just one of those lists that you keep adding things to. And I think it's clear, if one considers that, and the Roberto Matta series, that my mental set of influences has a lot to do with what Marcel Duchamp wrote in about 1910; that he was not particularly interested in what was going on in his own discipline, so he saw it as his business to gain impetus from other artistic disciplines.

I think one of the most virulent problems with most contemporary music one comes across, is that it consists of polite conversation, of social pleasantries, whereas someone like Michael (Finnissy), for instance, is laying himself bare to a much greater extent and thus producing the kind of sincerity in his work which is what attracted me to it in the first place. And I think I see the musical process like that, almost as one of sublimation, or the Artaud-like process of transforming one's pathological impulses into an artwork in order to externalise them and thereby bring about illumination of some kind.

RT: It seems to me that an element of violence is present in all your inspirations – Matta, Lautreamont and, I suppose, Beckett too, though the actual surface is much colder, more detached.

RB: It is and it isn't. Sometimes it is, but I think that a lot of Beckett criticism is so tied up in stylistic factors of linguistic usage, that it fails to get to grips with the fact that, what is being talked about – if understood – is almost unpalatably direct and therefore violently emotional. I don't think there's a case for saying that there is any transposition of style from Beckett's work to my own: I feel it much more as a parallelism.

RT: Are the Beckett quotations that come at the end of your scores in your mind from the start as a 'postlude', or are they just one of a large number of phrases in your mind at the time?

RB: It's more the latter. For a long time I've been engaged with a written work which has to do with Beckett, a large part of which consists of a fairly exhaustive compilation of things which became important to me in reading and re-reading the work. In 1984, in connection with a string quartet which will come later in the *Fictions* series – the precompositional

work was, in fact, reading through Beckett's entire work twice and making a lot of notes the second time.

RT: How much *do* you pre-plan in a work like *Anatomy*, for instance?

RB: Well, pre-planning and composition are very much tied up with one another as far as I'm concerned. The process from the initial apprehension of what a work is to be to the final product is not an outward process of elaboration of material but an inward process of the gradual specification of the material. So, if you like, everything is pre-planned, but the specific pitches, durations etc, are actually the last thing which is absolutely set. The large-scale decisions are taken first and then it's like a process of distilling, or gradually focussing-in on the final product at various levels, so that each formal level is there and forms the substrate for the composition on the next formal level.

RT: So the schemes are arrived at more or less pragmatically, to satisfy the broader requirements of the work?

RB: To an extent, yes. I think the psychological function of each event in a work is the most important thing. But material for me always works in terms of processes which are statistically elaborated, using a computer. I'm particularly interested in the idea of an exponential process of various kinds, because the way in which an exponential process will increase its *rate* of change as it is changing seems to me axiomatic to the way memory works when the mind is assimilating music – that a given situation is appreciated and then a certain change to that situation can be appreciated and, as one becomes more used to the kind of network of ideas initially set up, it changes more and more rapidly without one losing track of it.

RT: How far does the computer usage extend into the composition? Does it generate pitch sequences?

RB: Well, that would depend on what one means by pitch sequences. Nowadays the pieces have a set of what I've called 'virtual' pitch material, which is by no means related to the pitches one hears, except by certain processes: it's what is done with it that is important, and not the specifics. Once I've made the decision that the virtual pitch material will have certain characteristics, then those characteristics are mathematically generalised and run through the computer to produce one level of the piece, which is then worked on using processes that might be tangential to that.. The mix between system and empiricism in the final result is so complex that it's very difficult for me to figure out myself a lot of the time. Obviously that way of organising the material has been arrived at as a result of generalising from the heard, psychological function of that passage, or piece, or whatever it happens to be.

RT: The computer, the glissandi, and other things inevitably make one think of Xenakis. Has his work been of interest to you?

RB: Oh yes, it would be pointless to deny that. But (in *Anatomy*) I'm probably concerned to control the content of the texture much more finely than Xenakis would do. He's obviously concerned to write as many pieces as possible in as short a time as possible, and most of them are very fine pieces, but I don't view the situation of composition in quite the same way, I expect. Because of this idea of externalising whatever metaphysical, philosophical and political influences come to bear on a particular work, it is important to me that a work is arrived at through a long period of excavation so that, as the piece progresses from its initial inspiration to its final version or its final demise (whichever way you like to look at it), everything finds its way in there somehow.

RT: If I were to make the banal proposition that your work does seem to have a lot to do with the conventional notion of music as self-expression, how would you respond? How would you want to qualify it?

RB: Well, I think there's a lot of rubbish talked about music as self-expression. It's a very loaded term which has all this 19th-century deadweight lying about it. But let's not lose sight of the fact that, if it's not expression of oneself, whose self *is* it expressive of? And a music which attempts to dissociate itself from the idea of self-expression implies, I think, a very dishonest way of looking at things because it's fairly apparent to me that that's not the way things are.

To make a music out of disembodied abstractions might be a very interesting exercise for a composer to indulge in, but why should anyone want to listen to it? What has it got to say to them? What has it in common, if you like, with the listener that is going to be productive of some kind of empathy – I hesitate to say 'communication', because then we begin to get into linguistics, and that's a huge grey area as far as music is concerned.

I don't particularly want to qualify it, except in as much as it's difficult to use *any* term once one gets into 'pre-verbal' areas like that without loading it up with a lot of nonsense which is going to mislead a lot of people. So I think it's probably better to say nothing. I think the important thing for me in that respect is that a music such as this, which I suppose *is* 'visionary', 'confessional' and all those things, has a function, which is to be productive of what we might call illumination of various sorts in a listener.

Some composers are, no doubt, interested in communicating to a listener the fact that they are not interested in communicating anything. But I think we should make a distinction here between communicating the lack of communication, and communicating the lack of interest in it. Going back to Beckett, as I must once again: in his *Three Dialogues* he says that he's talking about the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, nothing to which to express, no desire to express, but the *need*. I think that puts it quite fairly and squarely: that the music comes about in the way it does because one is simply unable to do anything else, and it's counter-productive to say any more about it than that.

Anatomy for eleven instruments (1986)

> 'no the wish to be less wretched a little less the wish for a little beauty no when the panting stops I hear nothing of the kind that's not how I'm told this time'
>
> Samuel Beckett, *How it is*

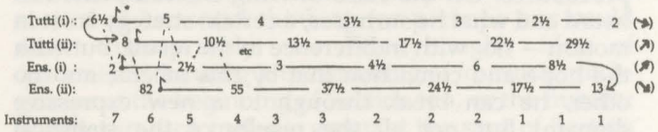
Anatomy uses a considerably larger ensemble than any of Barrett's other acknowledged works; 'a previous version of this work, a shorter piece for four instruments', the composer recalls with gloomy satisfaction, 'was a total failure'. Although almost every previous piece reflected his preoccupation with Beckett in some respect, *Anatomy* was 'the first to bring such concerns to the point of being central to its conception'.[11]

Ideally, each instrument should be amplified and mixed in such a way as to ensure that the individual timbres do not *blend* but are exposed as nakedly as possible – this is one aspect of the 'anatomy' of the title, and another involves the deliberate exposure of incompatibilities between the various registers of instruments (the superstitious might find it no accident that the overall pitch-range is divided into thirteen overlapping registers). The mood of the work is uncompromisingly bleak: this does not mean that it is unvaried – rather, it is an anthology of desolations. The individual parts are in many cases virtuosic, but the surface exuberance of *Coïgitum* has disappeared and, whereas the pianist wrestling with the notorious solo at the end of the latter work can, at the very least, count on an air of *heroic* failure, the horn player in the second part of *Anatomy* faces the prospect of a failure that can only be abject.

Leaving aside the literary and autobiographical factors which undoubtedly contribute to both the title and substance of the work, another 'anatomical' aspect can be identified in the way in which much of the formal structure, relatively blurred in works like *Essay in Radiance* and *Coïgitum*, is here brought to the surface. Instead of a slowly unfolding continuum, *Anatomy* consists mainly of abrupt alternations between materials which are constantly in a state of complex and rapid internal evolution. In the first part of the work (whose three parts form a downward 'exponential curve' of four, two and one minutes respectively) the cuts are between *tuttis* and 'ensembles', the latter gradually reducing in size until only one instrument is left. The durations of each *tutti* and ensemble are determined by two principal considerations: first, the time allocated to the ensembles is twice that allocated to the *tuttis* (respectively 256 and 128 quavers at ♪ = 96); second, both *tutti* and ensemble alternate between two exponential 'duration curves', one rising and one falling. The overall scheme is given in Example 36, and the various strands are characterised in quite distinct ways. The *tuttis* have a general tendency to glissando from relatively high or low registers to the centre, and to slide up *and* down in more or less equal measure when actually in the central registers. The extraordinarily 'unsettled' character of these *glissandi*, which play a major role in defining the whole 'feel' of *Anatomy*, arises directly from the conception of a 'virtual harmony' mentioned earlier in the interview.

Example 36

Duration scheme for the four alternating strands in the first section of Richard Barrett's *Anatomy*.



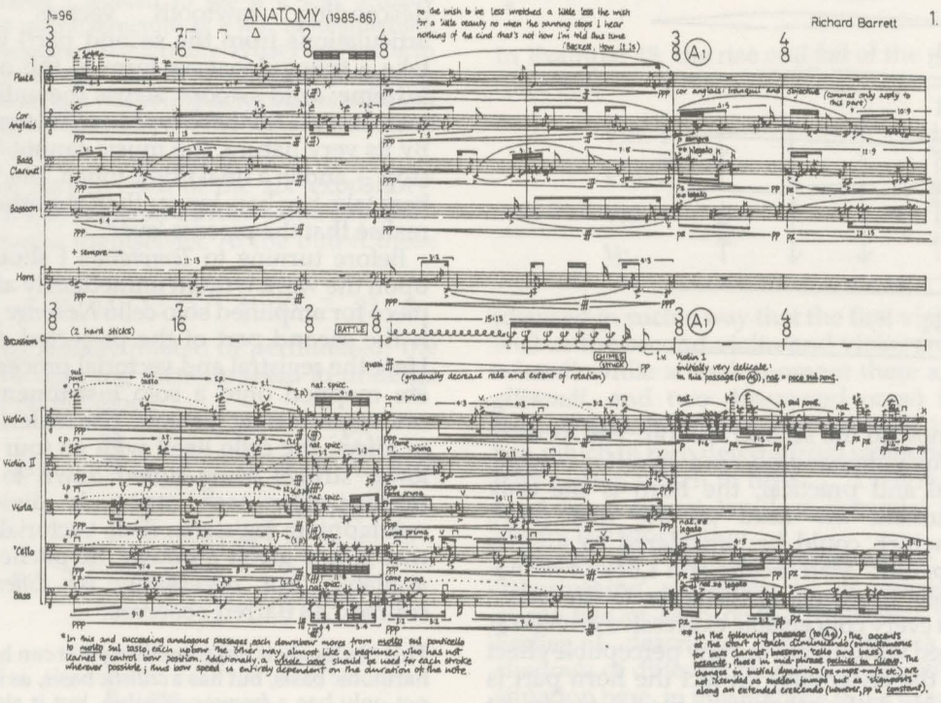
*Note that the two *tutti* strands *di*verge in length, while those for the 'ensembles' *con*verge.

In *Coïgitum*, where this notion is first applied, there are four 'modes' which function as 'virtual pitch material' in the sense that their notes serve as the hypothetical centre of computerised, 'probabilistic' distributions – the most probable outcome at any moment is a note of the mode itself, the next most probable outcome a semitone above or below, etc.

In *Anatomy* the distributions are made not around static notes (fixed points) but around *glissandi* (vectors), so that even the 'virtual harmony' (which may never actually appear) is in a constant state of flux (Example 37).

Example 37

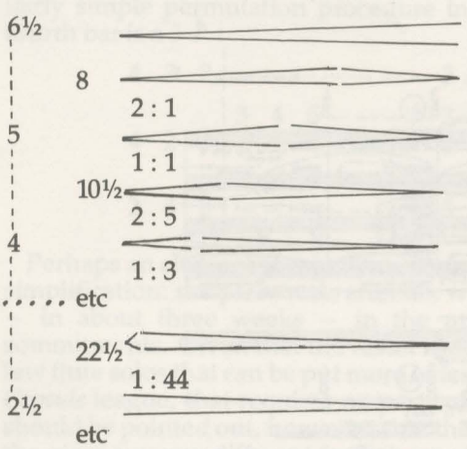
Richard Barrett: *Anatomy*, p.1.



As Barrett put it in his Darmstadt presentation:

> Two simultaneous pitch-vectors, defined as non-discontinuous pitch/time relations, have certain apparent characteristics, their speed and direction relative to one another (as well as their individual differentials relative to the pitch and time axes), which have nothing to do with the fact that they generate "instantaneous dyads" whose sequence is, in harmonic terms, irrational; in any case, too complex to be perceived as rationally composable. The instantaneous chord-sequence of ten such independent vectors (as at the opening of *Anatomy)* has absolutely no chance of being perceived as such. Nevertheless, since they do 'exist', it must be possible to deploy them in an organised form such that their posited characteristics and relationships are congruent with their posited functions within a musical/psychological stream of events.

In short, there is no guarantee, no certificate of theoretical rectitude that can be attached to such procedures. On the basis of what the composer has heard and what he surmises, a certain strategy is set in motion – not with indifference to the result, but with the hope and conviction that by this means, and no other, he can break through to a new expressive domain. But not all the results of the statistical operations involve such imponderable outcomes. The longer durations are generally subdivided in a clearly audible way. The second 'ensemble' of 82 ♪ , for example, consists of sixteen units 'normally distributed' around an average value of 5 ♪ (in practice, units of 3-8 ♪ , with 4-6 ♪ being much the most common), and four of the six instruments have an accent plus *decrescendo* to *pp* over the whole sequence of units. As the section proceeds the level of the accent gradually rises from *pz* to *sffz* and this, combined with the *glissandi* off each accent, provides an increasingly ominous and disturbing 'bell effect', rather like a decayed remnant of the 'Coronation' Scene in *Boris Godunov.* Each *tutti* section has a similarly clear dynamic profile, extending from *ppp* to *fff,* and shifting from a *crescendo,* via various balances of < >, to *decrescendi* e.g.



Let us turn now to the second section. The focus of this is a hideously demanding horn solo (for reasons both structural and practical, the horn is the only pitched instrument *not* used in the first part's 'ensembles'), which could be considered as a cross between an operatic 'Mad' Scene and Lucky's monologue from *Godot* (particularly the latter, to the extent that it explores every conceivable expressive domain at breakneck speed without having any perceptible effect on the rest of the ensemble). In fact the horn part is based on the kind of probabilistic modal treatment used in *Coïgitum,* and even if its behavioural patterns do not affect the remaining instruments, its pitch structure does, at least in part.

These other instruments draw on four different pitch-strategies, the initial one being a residue from the first part of the work. In that section, each of the thirteen registers was constantly 'scanned' by a waveform (sawtooth ⩘ in the outer registers, triangular ⩘ in the centre), and the pitches plotted around these waveform 'vectors'. The second section begins with a 'freeze' of the final position of section one in each register, which then becomes one of its own basic materials (the horn solo is, in a sense, a 'freeze' of the final 'ensemble' section). In another procedure, the horn part itself is used as a 'vector', and other parts are probabilistically distributed around it, either simultaneously, or slightly phased so as to produce a sort of distorted canon (see Example 38). According to Barrett's Darmstadt presentation:

> The third type consists of harmonic use of the mode-sequence in the same way as the horn (apart from octave transpositions upwards for flute and violins, and downwards for bassoon, cello and bass). A fourth type, based on harmonic derivation from the horn part, occasionally interrupts the procession through the other three; this type may be identified by occurring always in *diminuendi.*

It is also associated with rapid *staccati* or *jetés* which then, with different harmonic origins, continue into the brief third part.

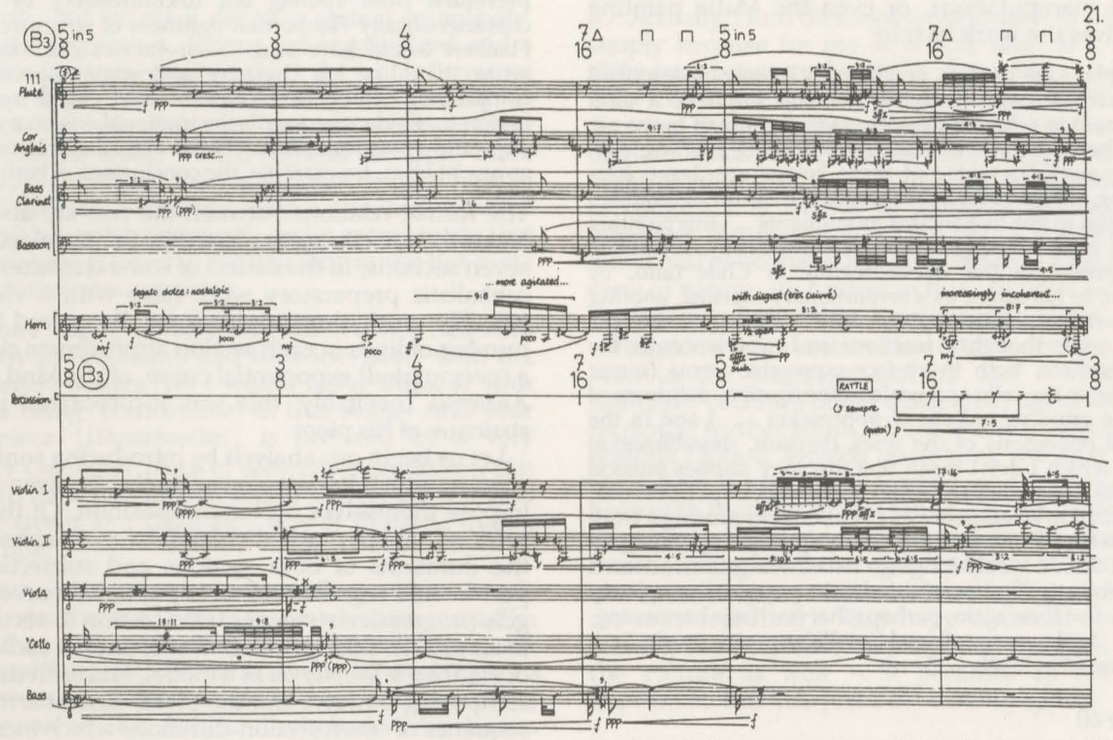
Whereas the first part of *Anatomy* consisted of sharp cuts, whether cinematic or surgical, from one material to another, and the second part allowed various material to evolve around a mercurial *cantus* (the horn part), the third part superposes three different materials not as synthesis, but as a confrontation *ad absurdum,* as a discourse on non-communication which may be less spectacular than that of the second part, yet is arguably more drastic. The upper and lower instruments (flute and bass) once again 'freeze' earlier material – this time the last version of the 'mode' structures from the second part. The remaining wind parts comprise, in Barrett's words, 'a tangle of descending sawtooth vectors' (with *staccato* articulations from the second part) while the strings take a triangular wave-form to the opposite registral extreme: wild swoops across the entire range of each instrument. All three types can be seen in Example 39. By its very nature, the music cannot 'end': it can only stop – and in a final ironic touch, the 'frozen' flute and bass take two bars longer than the other instruments to realise that the piece is 'over'.

Before turning to *Temptation* I should like to touch upon the work written immediately after *Anatomy*: the piece for amplified solo cello *Ne songe plus à fuir,* which is the second part of the projected *After Matta* cycle. Here the registral and vectorial procedures of *Anatomy* are mapped onto a solo instrument in particularly uncompromising fashion. The material of the piece is, in effect, the cello itself with its four strings (the two lower strings being tuned down to B and F sharp respectively): each string is divided into eight overlapping registers, each vectorially 'sampled', so that at any given moment, 32 pitches are potentially available (not necessarily 32 *different* pitches, of course). As Barrett observes:

> This obviously is not something that can have any functional harmonic basis, but has a *cellistic* basis, as it were: that a pitch not only has a frequency value, but it also has a particular

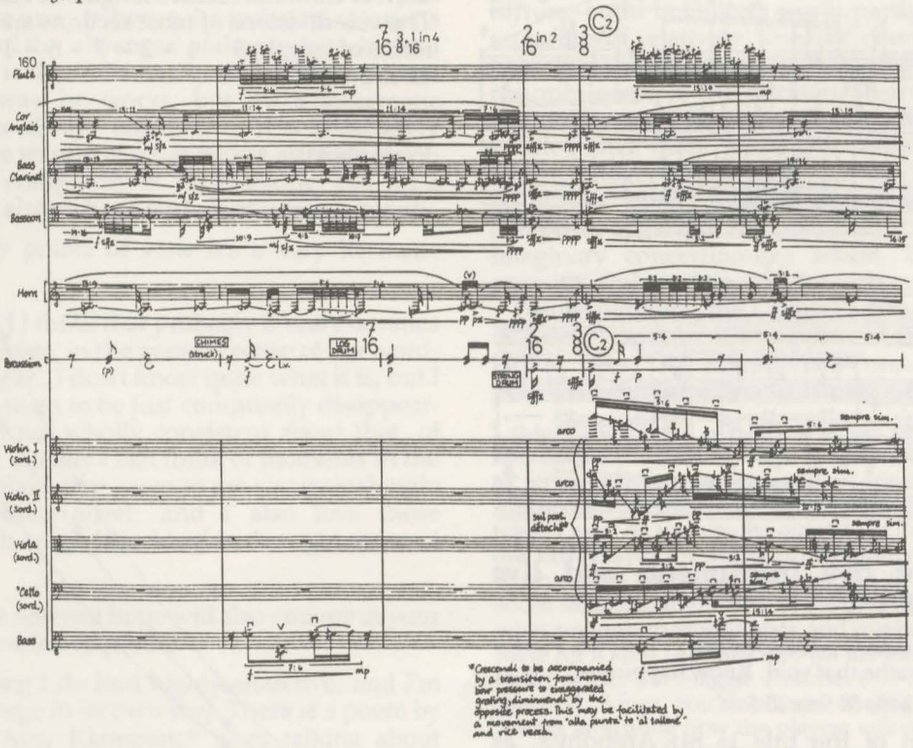
Example 38

Barrett: *Anatomy*, p.21.



The parts for horn, cor anglais and second violin in the third bar offer a clear example of probabilistic distributions around a central line (the horn part).

Example 39 *Anatomy*, p.29.



This passage demonstrates the three types of materials referred to in the text:
a) 'frozen' modal structure: flute and bass in second and fifth bars;
b) 'tangle of sawtooth vectors': wind parts throughout;
c) triangular wave-forms over total register: strings in fifth and sixth bars.

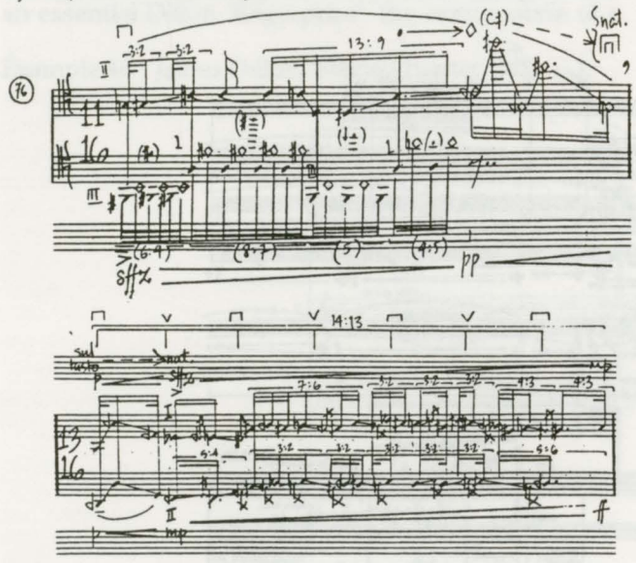
place on a particular string. It carries further many things which were first approached in *Anatomy*: the uncompromisingness of the way it comes upon an audience, the fact that it is for amplified cello, and that its material pays very little attention indeed to received ideas of melodic or harmonic structure . . .

Even considered in the wake of Xenakis, the cello style is quite extraordinary (see Example 40). The ideas underlying the piece, however, extend far beyond vectorial manipulations, or even the Matta painting which gives the work its title:

Ne songe plus à fuir depicts, in what may loosely be described as a 'surrealist' way (with all that *this* implies), a dark environment in which indistinct, vaguely human forms are seen in the midst of a thundery atmosphere swirling with luminous particles; some of these beings are desperately embracing, others cover their faces as if in terror or anguish, others stand in line like ancient monuments . . . this painting seems to relate directly to Matta's consistently outspoken denouncement of the fascist régime in Chile (and, by extension, to his stance as a revolutionary socialist, another set of convictions shared by myself). My work also attempts to distill some thoughts, reactions and experiences in the political sphere, both in surface-expressive terms (music extorted from the cello as if under interrogation, deliriums of hope, the grinding tedium of oppression . . .) and in the structural operations of the work (tension, destabilisation . . .), by which I don't mean that ideology implies musical style . . . or that I intend a certain awareness, or political will, to be kindled in an audience as a result of introducing a work in these terms. If music really were capable of operating on that level then it would long ago have been commandeered by reactionary institutions to render the populace completely stultified. But then again, perhaps that *is* what is happening, and the deployment of real intelligence in music is a subversive act in itself . . .[13]

Example 40

Two typically complex bars from Barrett's *Ne songe plus à fuir* (bars 76 and 101).



Temptation for five instruments and live electronics (1987)[14]

> 'No. One moment more. One last.
> Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness.'
>
> Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said*

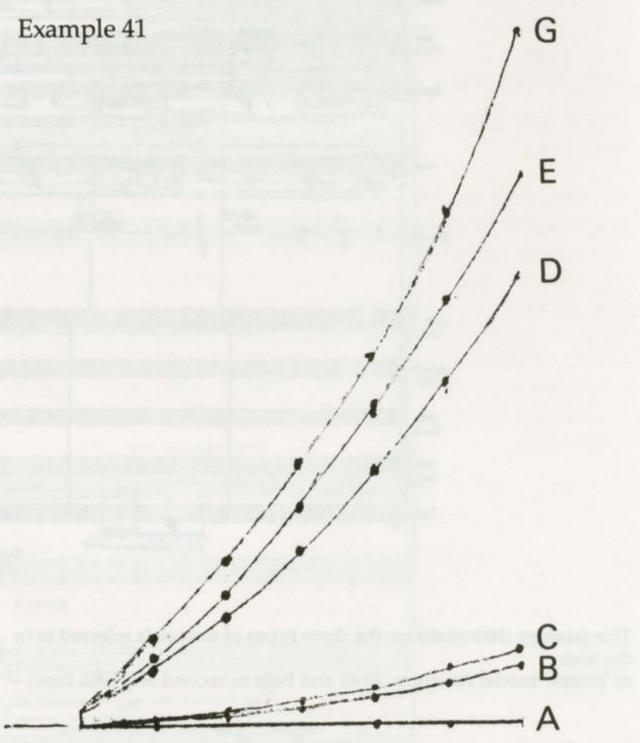
The temptation of the title is St. Anthony's, as described by Flaubert; the piece belongs to the *Fictions* series. The ensemble may be smaller than that of *Anatomy* but, thanks to the live electronics, the sound is at times much larger, much more dense, and the whole character of the sound is quite different. If *Anatomy* is claustrophobic and sombre, *Temptation* has a savage, ironic glitter – wild and yet icy. Of Flaubert's novel, Barrett comments:

> It does have the hallucinatory and feverish qualities of the other two writers' [Rimbaud and Lautréamont] work, but (crucially) its decadence and exoticism is (only just!) prevented from spilling out uncontrollably by a more characteristically Flaubertian tightness of structure. I think Flaubert would have said, *'Saint-Antoine, c'est moi'* in the sense that, like his character and some aspects of my composition, there is a constant unresolved opposition between a tendency towards the irrational, visionary, oneiric etc – and a fanatical mistrust of its emanations: I think this is apparent from, for example, the conclusions of both works.

The formal relations between the two are also close. Not only does Barrett's piece, like the novel, comprise seven sections; in the course of some characteristically cabbalistic preparatory work (also with a view to a possible music-theatre piece), he discovered that the number of lines in each section approximate closely to a (permutated) exponential curve, of the kind used in *Anatomy*. Inevitably, this was incorporated into the structure of his piece.

Let us begin our analysis by introducing some of the ways in which Barrett allows Flaubert's seven parts to impose themselves on his composition. Of the seven sections, all but one is divided into seven subsections; the durations of both sections and subsections are permutated segments of an exponential curve, which gets progressively steeper from section to section (see Example 41). Taking the number of lines in each section of Flaubert's *Temptation* as a model, and with the aim of composing a twelve-minute piece, Barrett arrives at a sequence of seven section-durations which increase by a factor of approximately $\frac{11}{8}$: 32″–44″–61″–84½″–116½″–160½″–221½″. These are reordered in the sequence 3 – 4 – 2 – 7 – 6 – 1 – 5, which again derives from the relative lengths of Flaubert's sections. The sub-divisions of most sections are also ordered (in terms of length) 3 – 4 – 2 – 7 – 6 – 1 – 5, as Example 42 shows.

Example 41



A graphic approximation to the duration 'curves' for all but Section F. The durations of each section have been ordered, from smallest to largest, and then plotted from an identical starting-point, though in fact these points range from 2½″ to 18″.

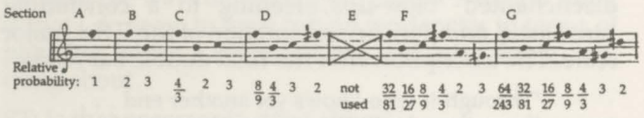
Example 42 Organisation of section-durations in *Temptation*

		(3)	(4)	(2)	(7)	(6)	(1)	(5)
Section	A	(3): 61″	normal distribution around 61/7					
	B	(4): 84½″ =	11½	+12	+ 11	+ 14	+ 13	+ 10½ + 12½
	C	(2): 44″ =	5½	6	5	8½	7½	4½ 7
	D	(7): 221½″ =	25½	30	21½	49½	41½	18 35½
	E	(6): 160½″ =	16	20½	12½	42½	33	10 26 *
	F	(1): 32″	this type of subdivision not used					
	G	(5): 116½″ =	6½	10½	4	47	28½	2½ 17½

*All sections except E are at ♩ = 60, therefore duration in seconds = number of beats.
E being at ♪ = 88, the quaver proportions are 23½+30+18+62½+48½+15+38.

The 'virtual pitch' system, like that for the increasingly steep 'duration curves', is directional, in the sense that the number of virtual pitches available progressively increases from one to seven, with the probability of each pitch being used gradually decreasing as it 'ages' (see Example 43). As will be clear from earlier references, this does not mean that Section A, for example, consists only of F! It does mean, however, that at least the heterophonically derived material (see below) tends to flow around it. Other pitch processes will be illustrated later.

Example 43 The 'virtual pitch' system in *Temptation*



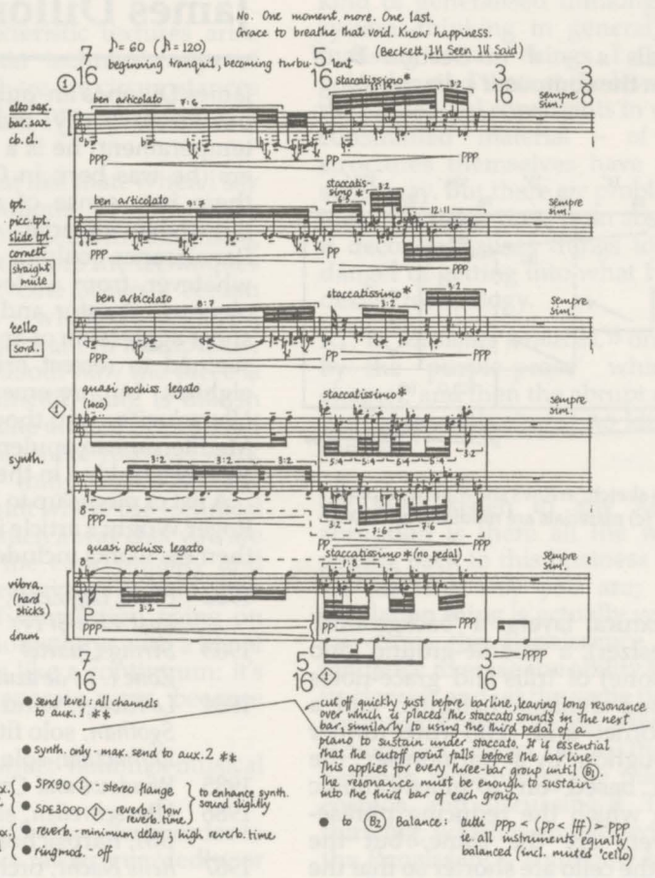
(Note, in Section E, how the 'exception' is becoming a virtual principle)

The ensemble (trumpet, saxophone, cello, synthesizer, percussion) is not a polite 'new-music' ensemble *à la Pierrot Lunaire*: in fact, if the cello were a bass or a guitar, it would be an archetypal 'free improvisation' group. Its timbres are, for the most part, rich and rough and, apart from the cellist, all the players 'double' to some degree, with the trumpeter on slide trumpet, cornet, trumpet and piccolo trumpet (tending to move upwards in register), the saxophonist on alto, baritone, and on contrabass clarinet (tending downwards in register) and the percussionist alternating between bass drum and vibraphone (The Raw and the Cooked, so to speak). The synthesizer player has only one instrument (Yamaha DX 7 or equivalent) but seventeen programmed voices employing a vast range of timbres. The live electronics perform various functions: primarily reverberation, harmonising, and ring modulation.

The three opening bars (Example 44) illustrate some basic principles. The first section comprises seven such

Example 44

Barrett: *Temptation*, bars 1-3.



In conversation, as in composition, Dillon is wary and distrustful of easy formulations – Schönberg's 'style' and 'idea', for example, are both treated as suspect unless they can be put in several sets of inverted commas or, in the manner of Derrida, 'under erasure'. The following interview picks up in the wake of the comments on and against style quoted above (p.7):

JAMES DILLON: I *can* trace my fingerprints in my work: they're really tied up with technique, and for me technique is something that is always in a state of genesis, that never really crystallises – if it *does* crystallise, then you're talking about something that gets close to this idea of style. The fingerprints are in some senses slightly suggestive of this thing that becomes rather frightening when you confront it (which is to do with whether we are just locked into some kind of karma – yet I didn't want to get mystical . . .)

RICHARD TOOP: What sort of things would you regard as 'fingerprints' in that sense?

JD: I think the thing that surprises me is that I can definitely hear a certain continuity in terms of timbral density in my work. There's a certain kind of quality in the sound that I think carries over from piece to piece. Of course, that again is a technical thing: it's wrapped up with the ways of making the pieces. Another thing is that I do seem to have certain tendencies in terms of phrasing which I seem to have difficulty doing anything about.

RT: Is that necessarily a bad thing?

JD: No. I'm not making any kind of value judgement about it: it just surprises me. It's a combination, I think, of the syntax of a phrase and its syntactical 'link' in terms of a concatenation, if you like.

RT: When you say that characteristic textures arise naturally as a result of certain technical ways of working, does this imply that there are circumstances where the technique has a sort of pre-eminence over the kind of sound it produces?

JD: No, I can't separate things out like that. When I say it's a technical problem, technique is not simply transcription. One of the great problems in composing is actually recognising the point where the techniques become almost self-suggestive. One brings a certain kind of notional level to a piece – whether you have a particular sort of sound that you want to manipulate, or some higher 'conceptuality' about how the piece is going to operate. The most difficult thing is that in some sense it has to ferment: quite often there's a kind of time-lag between the moment where you start work and the moment where the thing has somehow grown. And then comes this point where the technical solutions allow you to work in such a way that you are walking a tightrope between the conceptuality and creating a situation where the techniques remain open enough to have some kind of transaction going on *between* the conceptuality and something with a life of its own. The whole situation is like a continuum: it's impossible to string out the separate parts, because then you de-contextualise them.

RT: How far do you have an 'abstract' notion of musical structure?

JD: Musical logic only exists *inside* time. So in order to deal with time – and I say this rather guardedly, or tentatively – one has to spatialise time to some extent. When I'm working, because of the vectorial kinds of situations in musical construction, I find it very easy to break them down into temporal units. But that's merely a kind of practical trick, if you like.

RT: When you say 'vectorial', do you regard this as applying innately to *any* kind of composition, or simply to how you work yourself?

JD: I think all of it, in terms of the organisation of qualities. One just has to examine the complexity of the single sound, the extraordinary complexity that's going on in terms of amplitude, time, frequency, phase relationships, spectral relationships: all these things which are internal to the sound are vectorial qualities, not scalar qualities. One can break down the individual bits into scalar qualities, and when one is talking in terms of a man-made system it's a purely practical solution to dealing with the whole complex of things that are going on in a piece. So that if you're working, as I do, essentially as an instrumental composer, we're talking about combining the internal qualities of sound with action, and so the vector takes on a sort of higher-level application. If you like, it's an easier way of keeping track of a very rich methodology.

RT: Is this a polemic, in part, against Xenakis's notion of 'outside-time' structure?

JD: No, I'm saying that musical logic only actually makes *sense* 'in time'. I think there are certain problems with this notion of Xenakis's of inside/outside time. It's actually quite a neat solution to dealing with certain kinds of problems that are inherent in musical composition, in so far as 'outside time' is a very efficient way of recognising that what appears to be generalised material in fact contains a certain kind of structure. I think that what Xenakis did was bring a kind of generalised thinking from engineering (and systems-thinking in general) as an aid to conceptualising certain things. I also see its usefulness as going beyond that: at the level of actually highlighting the embedded constraints in what is regarded as 'non-constrained' material – of recognising that these structures themselves have also been 'designed' in some way. But there *are* problems: in some senses this idea of 'outside time' is an absolute nonsense, because it decontextualises things to a degree that there's a danger of getting into what I would call some kind of design technology.

RT: In *Musiques formelles*,[15] one can't help being struck by the 'purple prose' which opens almost every chapter, and then the abrupt recourse to mathematical formulae, with almost no kind of mediation between the two.

JD: Well, listen to any Xenakis work, and that abruption is there all the way through. Maybe it's getting back to this business of fingerprints – maybe it's just the way you are; I don't know. But this mediation thing is actually very complex. I think that, say from the Renaissance onwards, there is the tendency to erase the ability to mediate like this: it's at its clearest and, at the same time, at its most esoteric in language. I think the last attempt at it was perhaps the Scholastics, in so far as there wasn't a dichotomy between recognising the mathematical nature of the cosmos, and discussing it. The advent of positivistic thinking, which is embedded in the whole rationale of the Renaissance, somehow had to bracket-off all that

stuff. And eventually the brackets fell off the edge somewhere: we no longer have the language to deal with it.

It's a very difficult problem, because either you're accused of mysticism, or else you're accused of some esoteric rationalist approach: either way, you can't win. Hence, with Xenakis, this abruption or disruption that occurs between the dreamer and the mad number-cruncher: I'm sure he's aware of it. He becomes *semi*-mystical, shall we say, at times.

RT: If you've been working at the computer screen in the initial stages, is there a sudden change in your relationship to the material at the point where you start putting notes on paper?

JD: I am rather calculated at the beginning; it's partly a personal problem I have about being incredibly lazy . . . In order for me to achieve a certain momentum I have to start out as some kind of 'mad scientist', if you like. I start working in a very logical, structured way so that I have a strategy to get myself somehow enveloped in this bloody work! So I start making calculations, very crude calculations such as looking at the ranges of instruments and the characteristics of the instruments in terms of tessitura and somehow trying to formulate how they link up with the notion of the piece. Gradually it gets to a stage where you saturate yourself with these calculations: it's partly a preparation for actually writing the piece in terms of notation.

For me, notation is not simple transcription, as it is with Xenakis. I think you can't disengage yourself like that, and one of the useful things about notation is its circumscribed environment. Ideally, you use it to make the state that you are in even more concentrated, which is why I tend to write things out neatly: it's not just a matter of graphism, of 'how it looks on the page'. It's also a question of forcing myself to work at an incredibly slow speed, so that you begin to become aware of the micro-detail of what you're working at in a different way from the initial moment you might have made those marks, somewhere else.

RT: So you're fighting for each note, rather than churning them out?

JD: Yes. I tend to explain it to myself by saying that it's just slow proof-reading. But of course it's much more than that because, regardless of my calculations, and regardless of the systems I'm working with, it's still my responsibility to 'save the piece', if you like, or to recognise the qualities the piece itself has taken on by that stage.

RT: From what you say, it seems that a work has a certain 'poetics', evolved before the calculations start, which recedes during the calculations, and reasserts itself in the process of notation.

JD: 'Poetics'? . . hmmm . . .

RT: Well, let's say 'a certain aesthetic constellation' . . .

JD: Yes. Again, I'm putting it rather calculatingly, but I like to see it in terms of certain kinds of enzymes. The biological function of an enzyme is as a catalyst – it sets off other processes. And this notion of a piece that I'm talking about: I feel it in every part of my body. I taste it, I have a kind of tactile feeling of it. I have certain ways, perhaps, of explaining it to myself without articulating it – explaining it in so far as it gradually takes on a sort of spectral notion of itself. I don't know; it's very difficult to put your finger on it. The reason I hesitate again over the whole 'poetic' thing is this damnable problem of . . . Well, for me it's reductionism. You know, it's a term that is already lined up as a link with something else: 'this is how the artist works'. And I have no idea 'how an artist works'.

RT: Yet over and above one's general notion of music, there must be a notion of the specific form which that general conception of music is going to take?

JD: Yes. I can't calculate unless I have a fairly strong notion of what I'm trying to do. But having said that, this is where (partly tied up with practice) the whole thing is somehow in a continuous state of transformation, which is why the notion of programme music is inconceivable, particularly now: you're talking about a kind of transcription. And yet every piece has a *sort* of programme embedded in it, in a way.

RT: You once wrote to me about the flute piece [*Sgothan* = 'Clouds'], 'disexplaining' the title, or at least removing some of its obvious connotations – Debussyan or meteorological.

JD: Yes, but of course I'm aware, you see, of the poetic suggestion of the title. It's not wholly ironic: it's partly a technical thing, to do with breath (you know, it was a flute piece, and it's a very old problem). But having said that, I wouldn't have been interested in the technical problem if I hadn't already had some kind of meta-notion about what I was trying to do in the piece. I hesitate to speak about them, because it's too easy for one's attitude to be misunderstood, but I'm aware of symbolic levels in my work. It's just that there are certain levels you can talk about with a certain confidence, and others that we just don't have the language to talk about.

RT: But that's not to deny their existence . . .

JD: No. Actually you're a liar if you deny their existence, or an ignoramus.

* * * *

RT: There seems to be a sort of ritualistic aggression in much of your work.

JD: There's a marvellous fragment by Aristoxenes – I think it's in one of the Strunk *Source Readings* volumes[16] – and he is complaining (they're all moaners, the ancient Greeks, always whingeing about something), he's complaining about the decadence of music, and about how effete music had become, and that music should always be sexual and cosmic. And I always remember that when I first read this, I thought: 'That's it. He's absolutely right. He's hit it on the head'. I've always been fascinated by a lot of early literature, in so far as one often finds that quality in it: this pre-aesthetic and often pre-Socratic thing, this recognition – to put it rather poetically, in one sense – of the strong link between, say, sexual activity between humans or between animals, and some kind of cosmological activity. The ancient Egyptians would talk about the stars as being the result of procreation between the moon and the sun – there were always these metaphors. Partly, of course, it was totemic – a way of explaining, and introducing order into the way they explained things. But it also lends a very vitalistic quality to one's thinking.

RT: If what is involved there is not just eroticism as an explanation of cosmology, but also the ritualisation of eroticism, is it going too far to relate that to the mechanics of your work, on one hand, and the very 'physical' surface of the actual result? And is the

composition process the 'celestial mechanics' that organises the music into a certain cosmology?

JD: In some senses; I'm not wholly uncomfortable in saying yes, but for me it denies a certain complexity. Again, it's a question, for me, of engagement and a certain kind of authenticity. I think the whole literature about sex is very rich – I'm looking at it globally, in terms of cosmological thinking in societies right throughout the world – and, without being any more preoccupied with sex than any other healthy human being, I do find a situation where one is confronted with a highly potent moment, and it seems to me that my continuing interest in constructing music has some link with that same potency.

RT: At one stage you were very much concerned with the study of linguistics and thus inevitably with the new French writers, yet I would never think of your work as being 'Francophile', in that sense. And your latest piece [*Überschreiten*] is prefaced by a very typically Germanic piece of self-reflection (Rilke). If it comes to an actual philosophical stance, do you find you are closer to a Germanic way of thinking than a French one?

JD: There are two ways of responding to that. One is that the structuralist writers that interest me most (I'm aware that they both deny being structuralists) are Piaget and Foucault, who are amongst the most rigorous and systematic in their writing (there are precedents with someone like Gaston Bachelard, who had a tendency to poeticism). The other is that I was introduced to the poetry of Rilke when I was about eighteen, and Rilke seems to me to contain almost all the elements that I demand in art, in the sense that you get this complete unity between the technical solutions to something and the 'aliveness' of the work itself. And the clue for me is that Rilke really is very systematic, I think, in the way he works, but it's a systematic thinking that is always engaged – that completely encapsulates the texture of what makes art vital, if you like. I love the complexity of his thinking, but it's a complexity that always has a surface of extreme beauty.

RT: From many points of view it's a very hermetic surface!

JD: Yes, it is, and I think that probably if one examines my interest in artists, in the general sense of the word, they're all hermetic. I don't know quite what it is, but I like things that seem to be just continually disappearing as well. I'm not wholly consistent about that, of course, because equally I can think of moments in the poetry of Baudelaire that seem to me so astonishingly disruptive in their effect; and I also love those moments, which are so 'shocking' in the right sense of the word.

RT: Which is the one you hope will also emerge in your work, as the occasion requires?

JD: It's something I do find highly attractive, and I'm sure it does emerge in its own way. There is a poem by the American Amy Klampert;[17] she's talking about flowers, and she describes the amaryllis as 'a study in disruption', which again had a certain ring of something I recognised. It's rather like seeing one of those slow-motion films of flowers opening, where you become incredibly aware that the flower is not about 'this' or 'that', but something in between: it's this kind of moment where things are between order and disorder.

RT: Does this reflect a Northern sensibility rather than a Southern one? Wouldn't southerners be more likely to gather their amaryllis and stick it in a pot?

JD: Actually, I find this almost impossible to talk about, simply because for me as a Scot there is a massive difference between the Celts, if you like, and people who live in the southern part of Britain. There's no denying that, but it's not a big problem for me. In England it has become rather 'sophisticated' to try and deny this thing; it's partly to do with historically trying to congeal this island, to reinforce the alliance or whatever. But there's no doubt that if you live on the west coast of Scotland it is impossible to have this rosy view of nature: it's forever in flux. To what extent that has infiltrated my being, I really have no idea.

I think there *is* a certain kind of aliveness sometimes, even in the language and its use, a vitality that somehow becomes rather dissipated, rather difficult to recognise further south. I tend to think that one of the reasons I found Xenakis fascinating was that we both come from the fringes of Europe, and I can see certain links with his work in that sense. There's no doubt that if you are born and bred in Central Europe (or Southern England) there's a tendency to turn culture into something too cosy, which is why figures like Rilke are so extraordinary. They happen almost despite the culture, but of course, they are also wrapped up with the culture as well – it becomes so inextricably interlinked that you just can't disentangle it.

String Quartet (1983)

The String Quartet seems to mark something of a turning-point in Dillon's work; partly because, after a sequence of relatively 'linearly' conceived pieces like *Come Live With Me*, *Parjanya-vata*, and *(Time Lag Zerø)*, it resumes some of the harmonic features of . . . *Once Upon a Time*, and partly because its formal construction is altogether more ambitious, both in scale and in manner. Roger Wright refers to it as a 'complex network of braids which overlap and interact'[18], and the composer speaks of the metric structure as 'a kind of imaginary concertina-like action, continually compressing and rarefying the interplay of events'.

Before pursuing the Quartet's structural aspects, let us briefly consider Dillon's view of the medium *per se*. Earlier (p.8) he commented on its 'labyrinthine potential', but the limitation factor also plays a role:

I think one of the reasons it works is not just a certain homogeneity of instrumental timbre – the fact that they're all string instruments with certain spectral similarities: for me the number four is symbolic, in a curious kind of way – when I went on to write the quintet [*Le Rivage*], and you add that extra player, the degree of complexity just explodes. And you have this microcosm, in a quartet, of a very concentrated social situation: in the best of the quartet literature you have what amounts to four soloists, and maybe there's a metaphor there for a kind of democracy (in the idealised Buckminster Fuller sense, not Maggie Thatcher's . . .). There are certain practical things you're always dealing with, and you're always imagining how the players will deal with them, in a situation where there's no conductor.

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lends itself to a very rich interplay in the mapping of memory and time. You can play with the granular situation of suggesting things, and then perhaps allowing them to crystallise in some other context in the piece. So they may briefly suggest themselves in terms of some kind of figured gesture. And the thing I was trying to play around with, if you like, was what degree of concentrated trace you could leave behind, so that when it re-emerges, one begins to hear it in a new way, yet it has echoes of something. It's a question of 'presencing': it restates its own presence, rather than your being aware that it has 'come back again'. It's this whole problem, that we grapple with in music, between difference and invariance. In one sense it's a straightforward technical problem; in another, it's a problem at a much higher level to do with music itself and the nature of musical 'logic'.

The consequence of this outlook is not only a 'discursive' quartet, but also – however eliptically – a *thematic* one, to a degree one would scarcely have expected from any of the other composers discussed here. In its relatively slowly evolving pitch-fields, its use of register change to renew thematic shapes, and other respects, Dillon's approach to thematic working in this piece is not unlike Stefan Wolpe's, though I doubt whether the composer would be aware (or appreciative) of the fact.

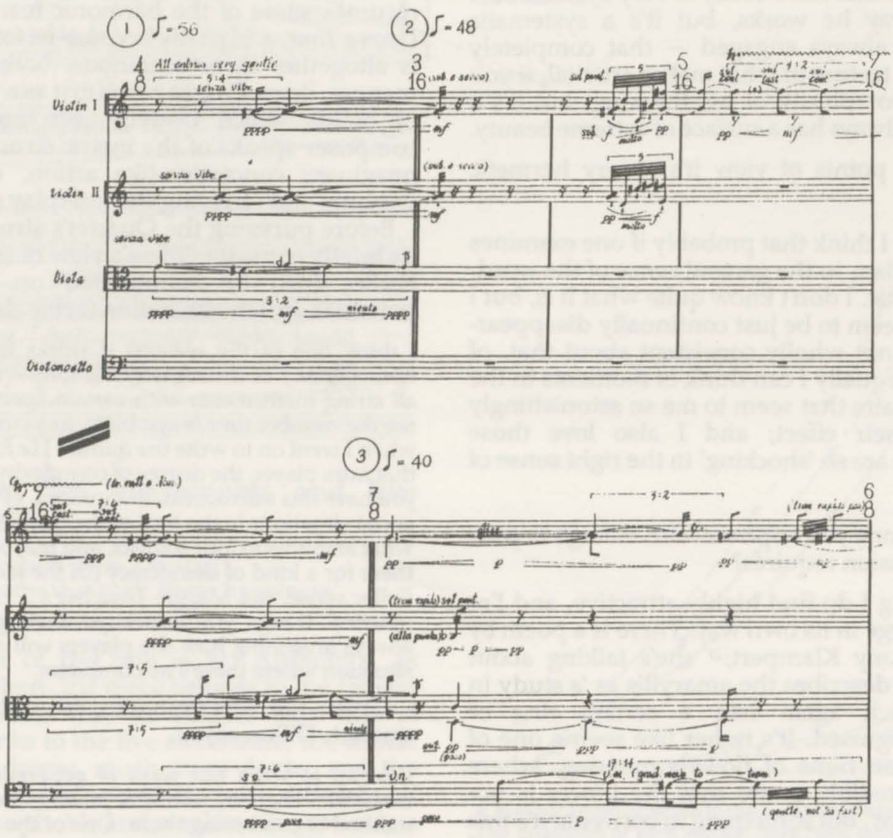
Many of the essentials can be demonstrated from the first page of the score (Example 46). The opening bar is, at one level, a 'pre-echo' of the thematic kernel in bar three; at another, it proposes a harmonic 'cluster' with two fixed dyads (G/A and G/F sharp) and a 'mobile' component (*glissandi* above and below the 'focal' G). On a broader level, this bar can be seen not only as evidence of Dillon's debt to Varèse (static harmony brought to life by independent dynamics), but also as an essential Dillon 'fingerprint': the combination of a sustained chord plus a narrow *glissando*, already used to open . . . *Once Upon a Time*, was subsequently to open (in slightly modified form) *Le Rivage*, *Überschreiten* and (albeit with a rather nominal *glissando*) *Zone*. And the viola's 'rhythmic polyphony', which played a modest role in *(Time Lag Zero)* and plays a rather more significant one here, was also to be established as a 'fingerprint' in later string writing (e.g. *Überschreiten* pp.60/1)

The figure in the third bar casts shadows of many different lengths and kinds. It will return almost literally a minute later, at the beginning of the fourth of the work's 25 sections, and again in the middle of the fifteenth, as part of a masked 'recapitulation' not unlike that in the first movement of Beethoven's Op.111 Piano Sonata. More locally, it contains the essential materials of the next few pages. The F sharp/G at the beginning and end of the first violin figure begins a process of transformation by octave transposition which is taken further in the following trill – all the more so since the *sul pont*. excursions lead to further octave displacements.

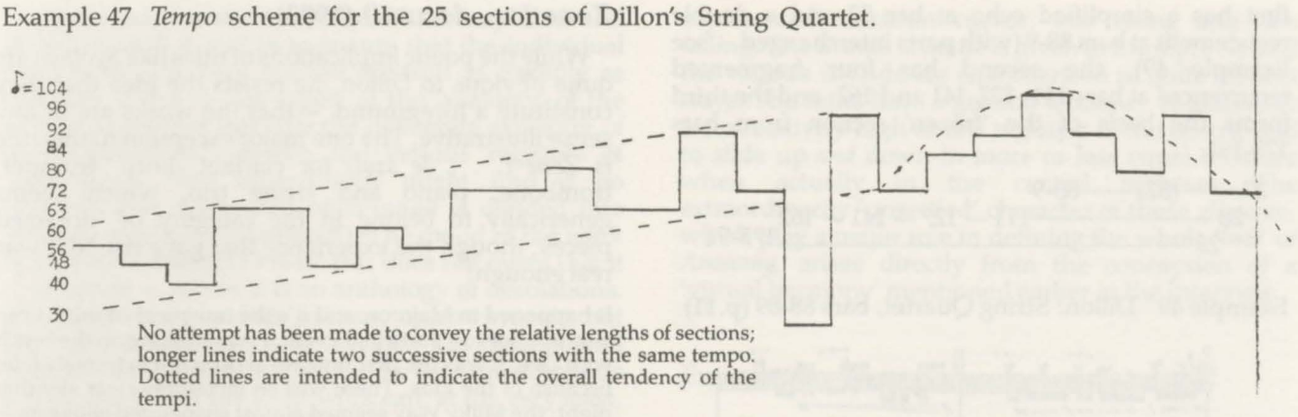
The G/A dyad leads considerably further. At the end of the fifth bar, which is basically a 'reshuffling' of the first, the low cello G initiates a slowly evolving melody which firstly fills out the F sharp/A cluster and then acquires most of the remaining chromatic pitches; the same thing happens quasi-canonically in the first violin (the viola C/D comes from the second attack in bar three; the third attack B/C sharp appears just over the page in the second violin's entry).

The whole Quartet is, indeed, a 'labyrinth' of such relationships, of figures which evolve ever more insistently until finally the piece dissipates in a cloud of

Example 46 James Dillon: String Quartet, p.1.



Example 47 *Tempo* scheme for the 25 sections of Dillon's String Quartet.



No attempt has been made to convey the relative lengths of sections; longer lines indicate two successive sections with the same tempo. Dotted lines are intended to indicate the overall tendency of the tempi.

ostinati, all room for new elements having been eliminated. Reference has already been made to the Quartet's 25 sections; without wishing to imply that the composer intended any kind of sonata form, one could justifiably assert that the first six sections are expository, in the sense that the materials are generally evolved one at a time, and that sections seven to fourteen are developmental, in that the materials evolved earlier are both expanded and interwoven, with the number of different materials in play at any one time tending, by and large, to increase. Section fifteen, as mentioned earlier, brings an 'embedded' recapitulation, interrupted by two passages (section sixteen, and sections 22-3) in which the material is virtually 'frozen', heading for a coda which gives the 'freeze' a more active surface through the use of several independent *ostinati*.

With three exceptions (between sections four and five, nine and ten, twelve and thirteen) each section introduces a new tempo, drawn from a scale of ♪ = 30, 40, 48, 56, 60, 63, 72, 80, 84, 92, 96, 104. (In general, as will be seen from Example 47, the tempo irregularly increases, the ♪ = 30 – which coincides with the 'freeze' – being a sort of insert/exception *à la* Stockhausen.) Of the work's metric structure, Dillon comments:

> In the String Quartet I wanted to see if it was actually possible to use the metric structure as a way of heightening something that was going on internally. What I was doing in the metric structure was almost a kind of imaginary concertina-like action, that was continually compressing and rarefying the interplay of actions. There are a whole lot of different kinds of units.

The number of bars in each of the six 'expository' sections (1, 4, 7, 5, 3, 6) suggests a proto-serial approach as do the bar lengths themselves. At the outset these are (in ♪):

8 3 3(2+1?) 5 9 14 12 11 4 10 7 13 6

Instead of being serially rotated or permutated, the bar lengths of the opening sections seem to undergo 'development by elimination':

Section ① ② ③ ④

8 3 (3) 5 9 14 12 11 4 10 7 13 6 (x♪)

⑤ ⑥

8 3 5 9 12 11 4 7 6 10 13

8 5 9 (4) 12 11 7 10 6

8 5 9 11 7 6 10

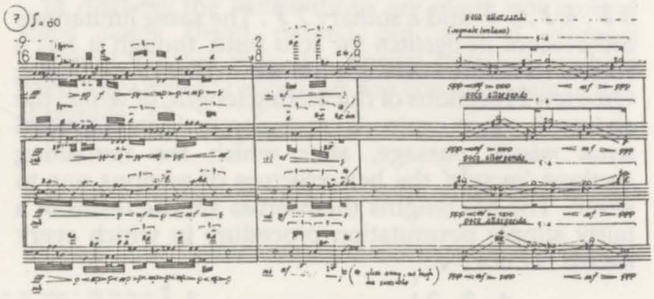
8 9 11 7 6 10

8 9 etc

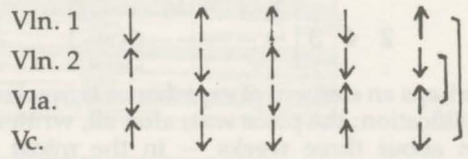
Any number of similar instances could be given, both for the bar lengths and for many other things, of a sort of *ad hoc* serial thinking (or perhaps one could more appropriately use Ferneyhough's idea of 'parametric thinking'): the ordering of four-note pitch-groups at the beginning of Section ten, or the number of notes in each melodic group at the start of Section thirteen are typical instances. More interesting, in a way, are the kinds of gestural models Dillon sets up in terms of, for instance, the balance of ascending and descending intervals within a phrase.

Example 48

Dillon: String Quartet, Figure 7 (p.4)



In Example 48, the rise and fall of the glissandi in the third bar:



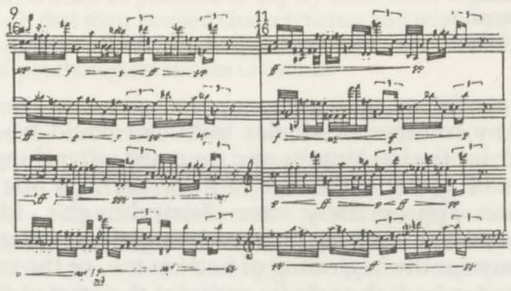
(devised in such a way that the first violin and cello, as well as the second violin and viola, are 'inversionally related', while at each moment there are two upward *glissandi*, and two downward ones) is extrapolated from a slightly less rigorous version in the previous bar, which in turn derives from violin figurations some bars earlier, which in turn . . . Clearly, figures of this kind have almost limitless potential for gradual or abrupt transformation.

Finally, by way of illustration of the Quartet's 'labyrinthine' strategies, let us consider the subsequent fate of each of the three bars in Example 48. Earlier, I described certain figures as 'throwing shadows of different lengths': that aptly describes the situation here, in that of these three bars (27, 28, 29), the

first has a simplified echo at bar 52 and a double restatement at bars 88-9 (with parts interchanged – see Example 49), the second has four fragmented recurrences at bars 111, 127, 141 and 162, and the third forms the basis of the 'frozen' section from bars 175-191:

27 —— (52) ——88-9
28 ——————111 — 127 — 141 — 162
29 ——————————————————175-91

Example 49 Dillon: String Quartet, bars 88-89 (p.11)



Inevitably, the formal preoccupations of the String Quartet are reflected in subsequent works, though generally in less complex ways: the wind quintet *Le Rivage*, for instance, is broadly cast in six sections of equal length, while *Zone* (of which more below) consists of six sections of steadily decreasing length. Though clearly concerned with bar lengths as a structural component, both works retreat from the complex barring of the Quartet: *Le Rivage* operates only with bars of 3 ♪ and 4 ♪, and *Zone* only with 2 ♪, 3 ♪, 4 ♪, 5 ♪ and a solitary 7 ♪. The same limitations are evident in *Sgothan* for solo flute, though it has a formal structure strikingly similar to that of the String Quartet: 24 sections of fluctuating length, of which the sixteenth, once again, is an 'exception': an extended *senza misura* passage, after which the remaining sections 'recycle' the bar structure of sections one to seven. The bar lengths themselves are the result of a fairly simple permutation procedure in which every fourth bar is a 3 ♪:

4 3 2 | — — — — — — — — 3 ♪
3 4 5 — — — — 3
4 2 3 | — — — — — — — — 3
3 4 5 — — — — 3
2 4 3 | — — — — — — — — 3 etc

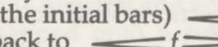
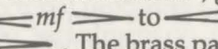
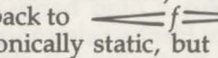
Perhaps an element of expedience is involved in this simplification: the piece was, after all, written quickly – in about three weeks – in the midst of other commitments. Given that the result is one of the very few flute solos that can be put more or less in the *Unity Capsule* league, that requires no particular defence. It should be pointed out, however, that the intentions of the piece are very different from those of the Quartet, not only in terms of the medium itself (*Sgothan* is very much 'about' breath, as well as the mechanics and acoustics of the flute), but also in terms of the way a formal structure is perceived. The String Quartet set out to create a labyrinth; *Sgothan* uses an analogous structure in 'testing the perceptual ''margins'' of a ''form'' '. The 'clouds' of the title 'exist as partially-organized structures, that are subject to further constraints at a higher (and often also lower) level: each ''cloud'' exists as both ''event'' and ''sub-event'' '.

Zone (. . . de azul) (1983)

While the poetic implications of titles like *Sgothan* are quite obvious to Dillon, he resists the idea that they constitute a foreground – that the works are in any sense illustrative. The one major exception to this rule is *Zone (. . . de azul)* for clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, piano and string trio, which seems generically to belong in the category of 'dreamed pieces', though the experience that gave rise to it was real enough:

> It happened in Majorca, and it's the one piece of mine I can almost trace to a particular event. I was walking on the beach with Dee; it was the first time we'd been out extremely late, because of the kids. There was an incredibly clear sky that night: the Milky Way seemed almost suspended above us – it was one of those curious illusions you get, that gravity is somehow twisted or distorted. It was really a shock for me to see this fantastic sky – I had always been used to northern skies, which are very dramatic, but this had a presence about it . . . It wasn't 'milky': it had a hue, a blueness about it that I found really shocking, because the sky had become almost black behind it, and the blueness you can see in a night sky – particularly in the Mediterranean – seemed somehow to have been transferred into this band of stars going right across the sky, and offset by the dark purple – almost black – of the sky beyond it.
>
> And all of a sudden, I knew what I had to do in this piece. I had this idea of a band of sound, with things breaking off it, with splinters: not a clean band with edges – but there was a kind of concentration at the centre of it. And this thing, as it moved away from you in distance, would gradually merge into a more statistical distribution of these contrasts. And *Zone (. . . de azul)* just means 'zone of blue' – while I was still out there I saw some kind of advertising thing that had *'de azul'* in it, and I just remembered it.

The work consists of six sections of diminishing length; the prevailing texture of three principal layers with shifting levels of intensity presumably 'mirrors' the night sky in Majorca that acted as the composer's inspiration. The ensemble itself – in principle exactly the kind of ensemble Dillon does *not* like to write for, with its disparity of timbre and, above all, the piano – is the residue of a request from Hespos to write a work for an even more arcane ensemble, including sopranino saxophone and flugelbone (sic), which must have seemed like a sure way of guaranteeing no further performances. In these circumstances, however, the stratified ensemble works very well – the strings provide a 'background', the brass a rather more active 'middle ground', and the piano glitters celestially, touched at the edges by clarinet trills.

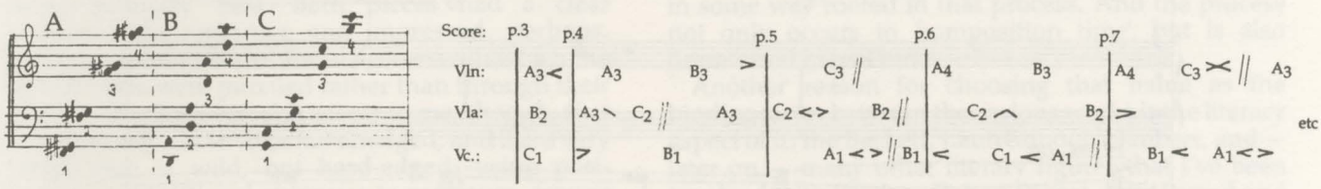
The first section (almost half the length of the whole score) rests on a continuous string texture based, rather as in the Quartet, on three dyads rotated between octaves and instruments as illustrated in Example 50. Each string attack has a *crescendo/decrescendo* pattern, and the overall structure of the string layer is itself a *'crescendo-decrescendo'*, going from (after the initial bars)  to  , and back to  . The brass parts are less harmonically static, but each instrument tends to be confined to six pitches at a time, again with an overall *crescendo* to the centre of the section, and with a tendency for the durations to increase from ♪ to an average of ♩. The piano part, in contrast, is a mosaic of interlocking gestural and pitch structures rather reminiscent of the Quartet's 'labyrinthine' moments. In passing, one might note that for a composer who professedly dislikes the piano, Dillon has a remarkably distinctive and effective way of writing for it. The early solo piece *Spleen* apart, it is far removed

from the 'full-on' Finnissy/Dench style, and any surface resemblance is largely a matter of short note-values (though usually associated with rather slow tempi) and irrationals. Both in *Zone* and in *Überschreiten*, the keyboard writing has a crystalline elegance that contrasts sharply with the more rugged treatment of the other instrumental forces (Example 51).

As in the Quartet, there is a clear overall tempo strategy – or rather, two strategies: the first part zig-zags downwards, in a sort of inversion of the Quartet's tempi, while the five remaining parts constitute an overall 'arch' of tempi. In fact, if one were – speciously – to graft the Quartet's first three tempi onto the *end* of the tempo plan, one would have almost exactly the same kind of straight-line-plus-arch format, and with almost exactly the same number of tempo changes (bearing in mind, though, that *Zone* is about a third of the length of the Quartet). See Example 52.

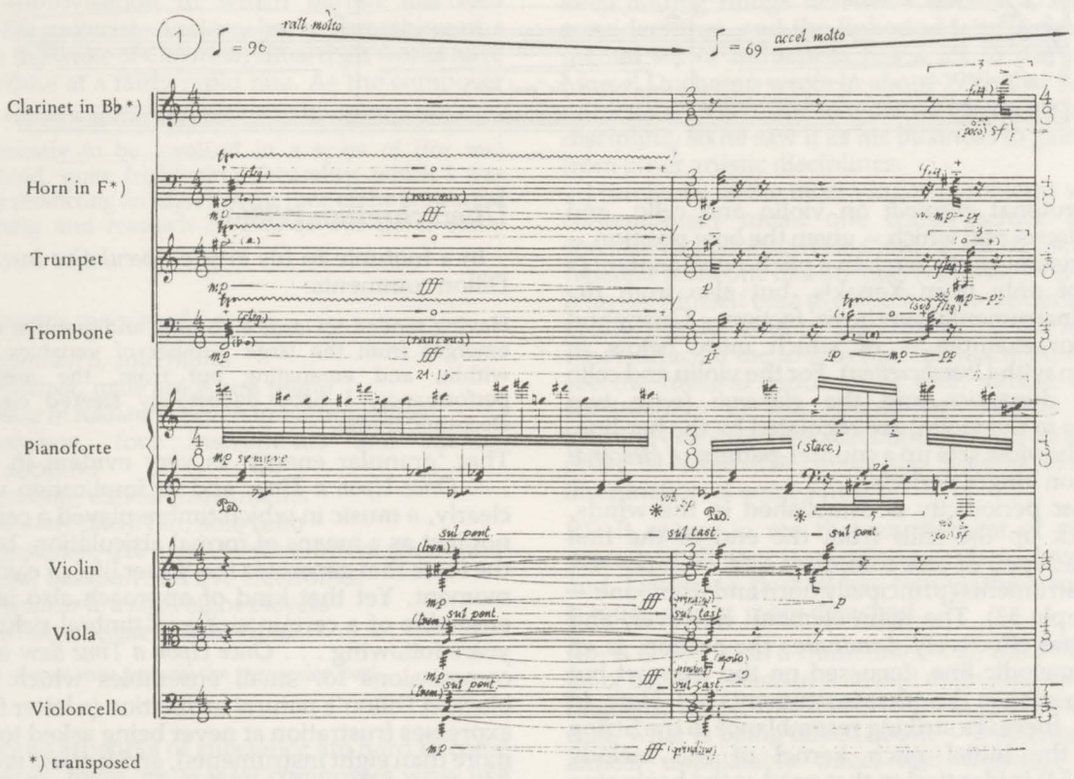
The remaining sections of *Zone* operate with simpler forms of the same kind of stratification. In the second section the piano is silent apart from a brief entry a third of the way through, which partly brings back material from the first section. The strings, now in a much higher register and playing virtually on the bridge (as opposed to the *tasto* →*pont*. fluctuations of the first section), maintain a continuum varied only by

Example 50 Rotation of three dyads in the sections of *Zone*

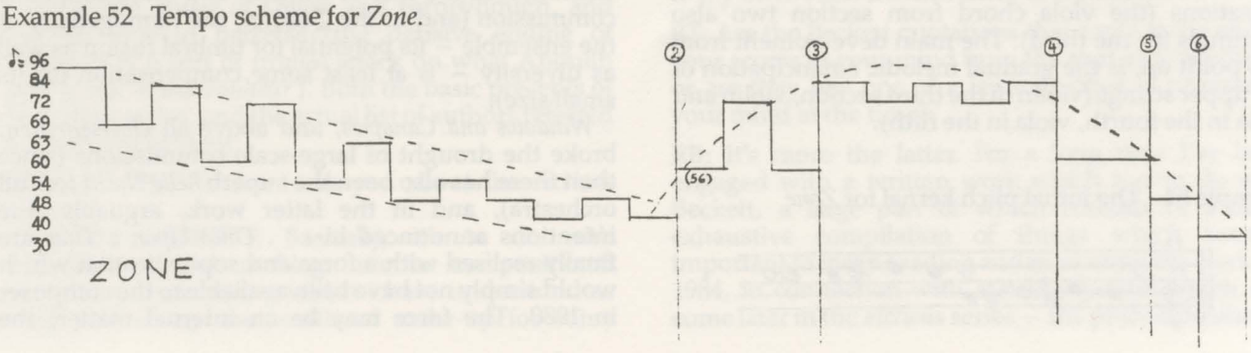


The signs after certain letters – ^etc – refer to *glissando* inflections

Example 51 Dillon: first two bars of *Zone*.

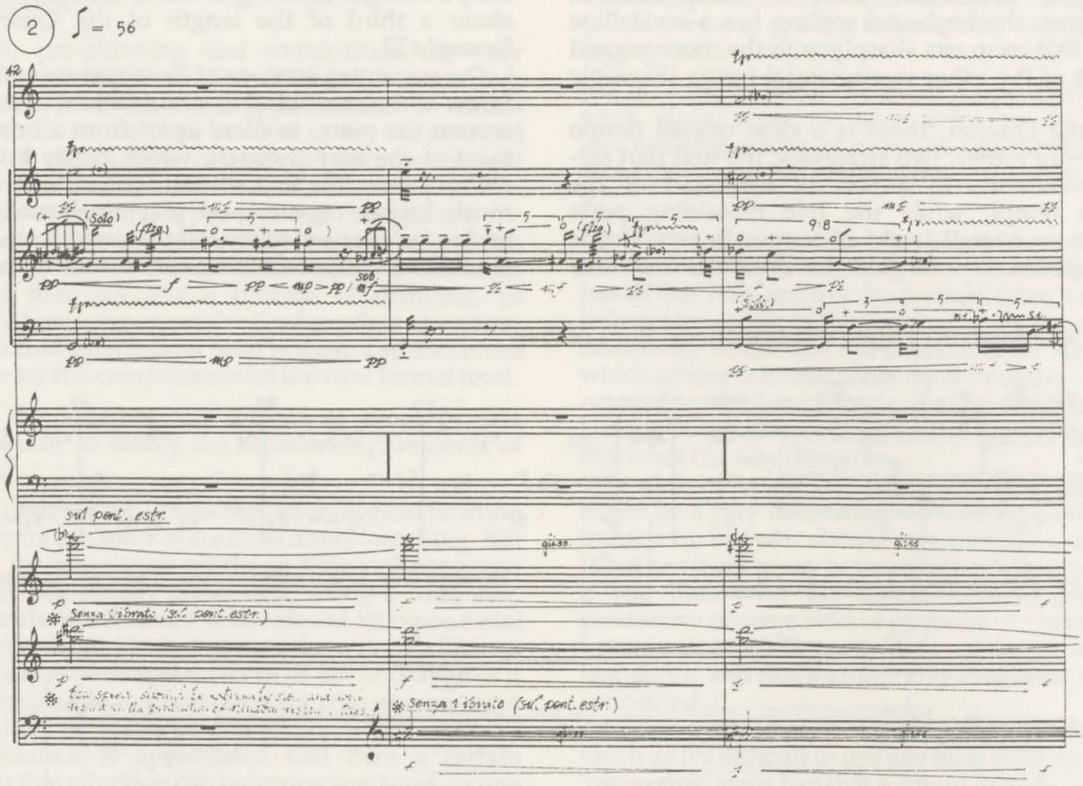


Example 52 Tempo scheme for *Zone*.



Example 53

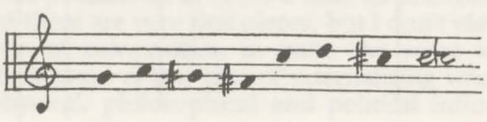
Opening of the second section of *Zone*.



slow microtonal *glissandi* on violin and cello, and *crescendi/decrescendi* which – given the bow position – lead to constant shifts in relative pitch/noise content (a legacy not only from Xenakis, but also from the Parisian 'instrumental synthesis' faction – Grisey and Murail, for example – of which more below in connection with *Übershcreiten*). For the violin and cello both the dynamics and the *glissandi* (with two exceptions in the violin) are regulated by the bar-line, whereas the viola sets up a counter-pattern of *crescendi* etc based on longer periods.

A similar periodicity is established in the winds, which pick up the trills from the end of the first section: each pair of bars comprises a Tr. | for two instruments (principally horn and trombone – (see Example 53). The main element, however, and the one that effectively dominates the section, is an evolving melodic line, focussed on the trumpet but initially passing to the other instruments too. Here, in particular, there is a striking resemblance to the String Quartet; the initial pitch kernel of the melody (Example 54) is identical to that used at the beginning of the Quartet. The last four sections are linked by a low *scordatura* G on the cello which continues the <> pulsations (the viola chord from section two also continues for the third). The main development from this point on, is the gradual melodic emancipation of the upper strings (violin in the third section, violin and viola in the fourth, viola in the fifth).

Example 54 The initial pitch kernal for *Zone*



Überschreiten (1986)

In a footnote to his article *Speculative Instruments*,[19] Dillon comments:

> Having tended towards a peculiar and granular *energy* that emerges from the large number of variables contained within, and emanating out from, the mediation of performance, I have deliberately steered clear of the electronic studio.

That 'granular energy' is very evident in the early . . . *Once Upon a Time*, and its implication was, very clearly, a music in which timbre played a central role, not just as a means of formal articulation, but also as the force that generates the 'inner life' of each musical moment. Yet that kind of approach also implies an ensemble of a certain size and timbral richness. The years following . . . *Once Upon a Time* saw a series of commissions for small ensembles which probably blocked Dillon's natural inclination (a letter from 1984 expresses frustration at never being asked to write for more than eight instruments), and it could well be that the linear-discursive style of much of the String Quartet represents a slightly desperate act of re-definition in the face of the lack of a more congenial commission (and in the Quartet, the homogeneity of the ensemble – its potential for timbral fusion as well as diversity – is at least some compensation for its small size).

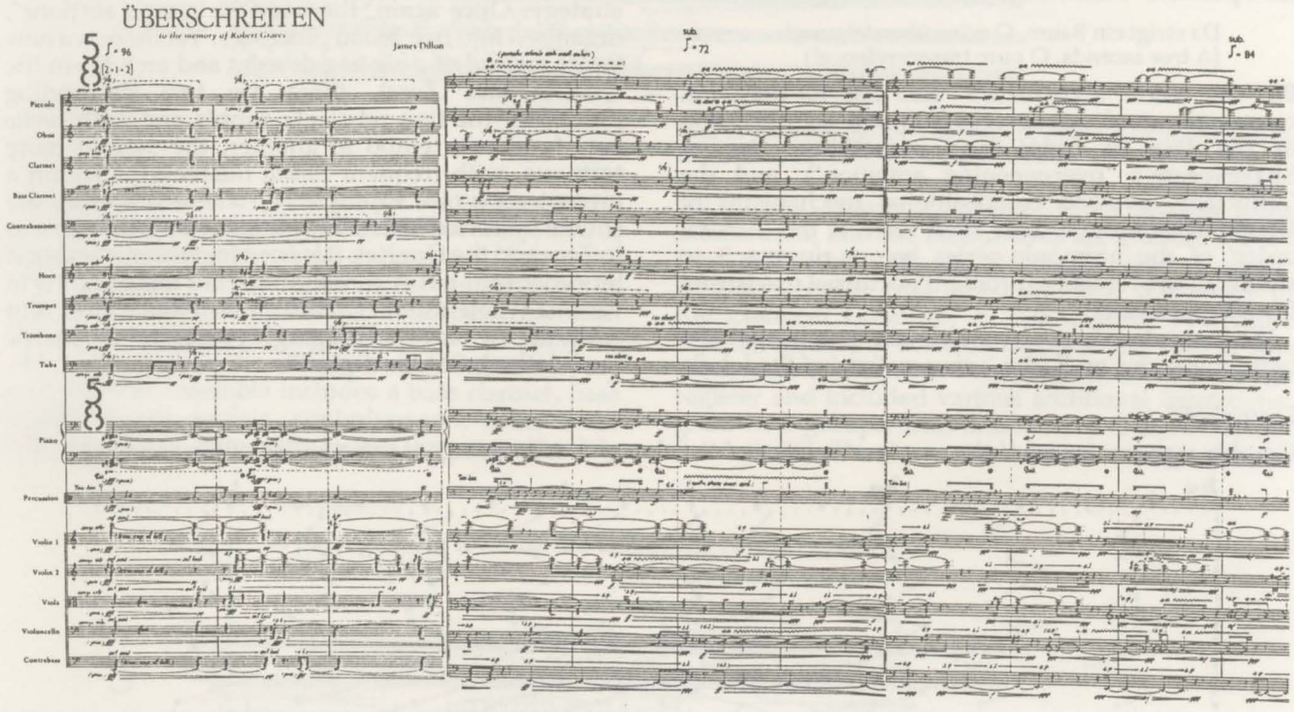
Windows and Canopies, and above all *Überschreiten*, broke the drought of large-scale commissions (since then there has also been the superb *helle Nacht* for full orchestra), and in the latter work, arguably, the intentions announced in . . . *Once Upon a Time* are finally realised with a force and sophistication which would simply not have been available to the composer in 1980. The force may be an internal matter; the

sophistication can be established in three particular ways. First, Dillon's range of options in formal planning has grown; second, the 'discursive', quasi-thematic procedures of the Quartet are now available as a means of 'animating' timbral blocks; third, the composer can profit both from the IRCAM researches into the nature of timbre, and from the efforts of composers like Grisey and Murail to transpose the experiences of the electronic studio into instrumental music. There is no doubt that a piece like *Überschreiten* owes a certain debt to these composers, but it draws consequences which are some remove from their work, both technically and aesthetically.

The fundamental differences can be simply established by comparing the opening of *Überschreiten* with that of an ostensibly similar work, Gerard Grisey's *Partiels* – a piece of comparable scale and with the same size of ensemble. Both pieces open with the insistent exposition of an overtone spectrum based on a low contrabass E. But for all that Dillon might share some of Grisey's ideas about *'le devenir du son'* – the evolving sound as the substance rather than the surface of a piece, the similarity ends there. *Partiels* opens with a didactic/cosmetic exposition of the 'natural' harmonic series, using an approximation of studio filtering techniques to 'highlight' certain areas of the spectrum in each systematic build-up: the result is elegant, but perilously close to kitsch. In *Überschreiten*, on the contrary, the 'partials' are in turmoil from the outset: the fundamental (E) is constantly present, but blurred to a large degree by tam-tam and piano. For a moment, the 'partials' have something like a plausible octave layout, but their timbre and dynamics are fluctuating wildly, and within moments they are being 'folded into' one another (see Examples 55 and 56).

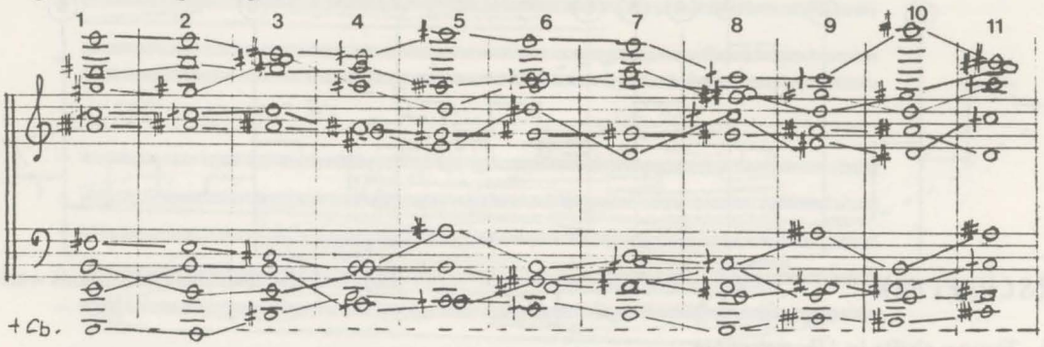
Example 55

Dillon: *Überschreiten*, bars 1-10, containing the first seven 'voicings' of the basic chord.



Example 56

Chord voicings for the opening sections of Dillon's *Überschreiten*.



Only wind and brass parts are shown here, partly for the sake of clarity, partly because the timbre modifications of the string parts make octave assignations rather nominal. The low E on double-bass runs throughout; connecting lines show the movement of individual voices.

At this point, a few words on the title *Überschreiten*, which derives from the last line of the fifth of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*:

> Und er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet.
> (In his very overstepping, he obeys)

Roger Wright comments that:

> Dillon wanted to create a piece in which sections overstepped one another, and in which the music becomes 'auto-reflective', as if it inhabited a space between two mirrors.

In fact there are many respects, from the smallest details to the broad form, in which one could demonstrate the 'overstepping' of the title. But I should be reluctant to confine its significance to technical procedures and, as Wright also indicates, there are many other lines in the *Sonnets to Orpheus* that could have served as motto for one aspect or another of the piece. The very first line of the first sonnet, with its fusion of the organic and the transcendental, could arguably serve as the emblem for a possible 'Dillon aesthetic':

> Da steigt ein Baum. O reine übersteigung!
> (A tree ascends. O pure transcendence!)

But the word *'überschreiten'* also has its dissident connotations: of excess, rebellion and transgression in the face of order (and something, too, of Shakespeare's 'over-weening ambition'), and the 'artificially' evolved compositional mechanisms of *Überschreiten* seem to bare their teeth at the 'natural order' of the harmonic series before ripping it to shreds so as to create a turbulent nocturnal maelstrom from its remnants.

We have already noted the eleven 'revoicings' of a harmonic series on E (the *'prima materia'* of the whole work) which together form a huge decrescendo, subarticulated by the sequence:

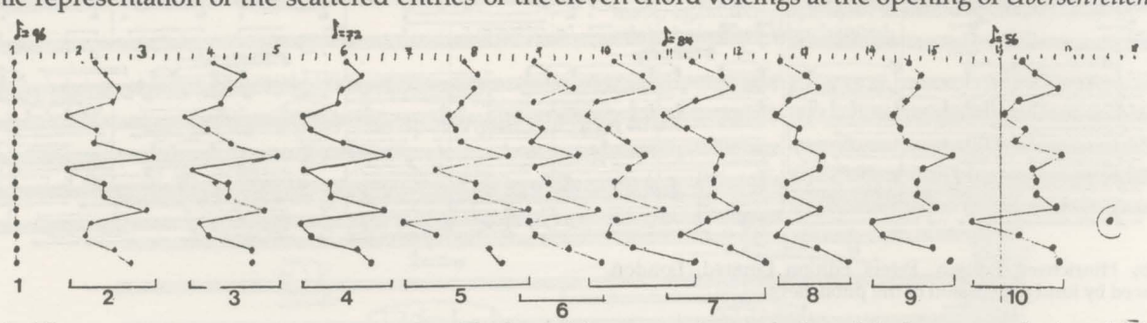
ffff — *pp* (twice)
fff — *pp*
ff — *ppp*
ppp — *f* — *ppp*
ppp — *mf* — *ppp*
ppp — *mp* — *ppp*
mf — *ppp*
mp — *ppp*
p — *ppp*
pp — *pppp*

The attacks are not, apart from the very first one, simultaneous, but are statistically distributed around an average value of 31 𝅘𝅥𝅯 (each instrumental line ends with this 'reference value', see Example 57), and each value is reduced at the end by a series of rests based on prime numbers (2, 3, 6, 7 or 11 𝅘𝅥𝅯).

The tempo-changes which intersect this process at five-bar intervals are part of a by-now-familiar overall strategy. Once again, there are 25 'tempo sections', organised into two broad processes. Yet there is a new twist: instead of a zig-zag descent and arch (as in the Quartet and *Zone*), there are two descending processes, the first relatively simple and with *subito* cuts from one tempo to another, the second more tortuous, with frequent *rubato* fluctuations within a given tempo (see Example 58, where the *rubati* are shown by dotted lines). The tempo scale is the same as in *Zone* and the Quartet; it is not a logarithmic scale *à la* Stockhausen, but is chosen to permit tempo shifts in various whole-number ratios (not unlike Carter, but without the overt 'bridging' processes of metric modulation). See Example 59.

Example 57

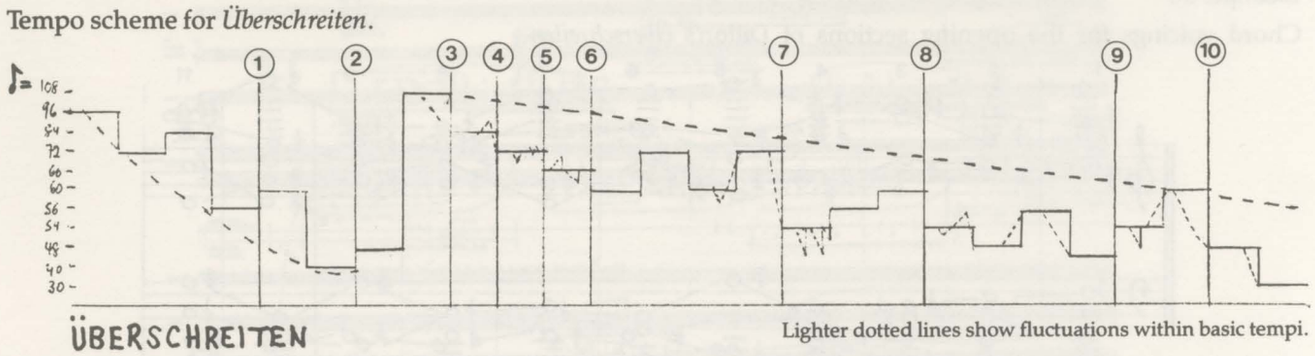
Graphic representation of the scattered entries of the eleven chord voicings at the opening of *Überschreiten*.



Example 58

The 'layout' from top to bottom is that of the instruments in the published score.

Tempo scheme for *Überschreiten*.

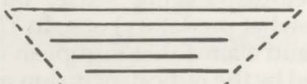


Lighter dotted lines show fluctuations within basic tempi.

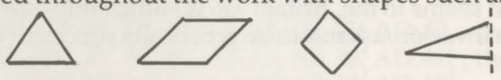
Example 59 Tempo shifts in *Überschreiten*

♩ = 96	—	72	—	84	—	57	—	60	—	40	—	48	—	108	—	84	—	72	—	66	—	60	—	72	etc
		4:3	/	6:7	/	3:2	/	14:15	/	3:2	/	5:6	/	4:9	/	9:7	/	7:6	/	6:5	/	11.10	/	5:6	

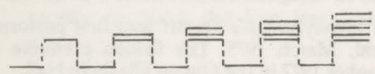
Technically, though not in terms of sound, the 'spectral' preoccupations of *Überschreiten* almost inevitably bring recollections of Stockhausen's *Gruppen* and even the Cerha of the *Spiegel* series (and probably quite fortuitously, the opening of *helle Nacht* sounds rather like the start of *Spiegel I*): specifically, the piece is full of rhythmic and textural 'formants'. A simple example is the layout of the strings in the first numbered section:



This is the putative source of any number of symmetries and fragments of former symmetries, scattered throughout the work with shapes such as:



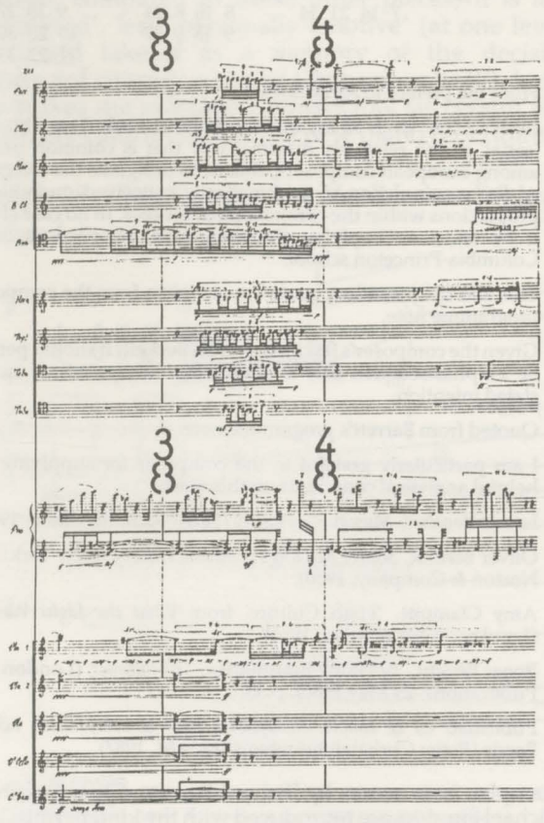
(see Example 60 for a relatively concise and exposed example). In fact, the whole work is, like the String Quartet, a labyrinth of traces, in which figures evolved near the start of the work re-echo at various distances. A particularly clear instance of this is the woodwind chord that gradually builds up, in alternation with a trombone pedal-point, behind the string spectra after Figure Two:



Once established, this material then emerges in its own right as a sort of *ritornello* (at bars 82, 143, 203, 278 and, fragmented, at the end of the work), each time with a slower tempo, a louder dynamic peak, and the involvement of more brass instruments.

Example 60

Überschreiten, p.77.

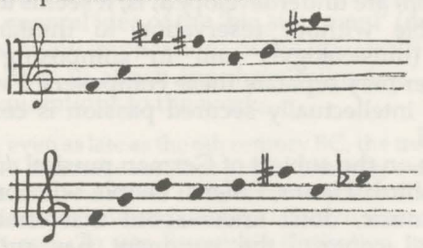


Note the lozenge-shaped 'formant' in the second bar.

Finally, though a thematic element is less pronounced in *Überschreiten* than in the Quartet, it can clearly be shown to exist. In the Quartet, the opening dyads eventually give rise to a recurrent melodic shape whose 'standard form' is given in Example 61 a. Likewise from about bar 149, *überschreiten* is pervaded by a comparably contoured figure, shown, in Example 61 b, in an equal-tempered piano version from bar 163.

Example 61

Melodic shapes in *Überschreiten*



Epilogue

The more one looks at the work of any imaginative composer, the more 'unique' it seems to become, the more disjunct from other significant bodies of work. To the extent that, as in the preceding pages, one considers composers' works only in relation to themselves, this becomes virtually a self-fulfilling prophecy. From what these four composers have to say, and even more so from their works, it should be clear that one is dealing with four distinct creative outlooks, and four very distinct musics. Yet one only has to step back for a moment and place their work within the broader context of British music today – even that being written by their contemporaries – to sense an immediate, shared 'apartness'.

The essence of their apartness, perhaps, is that they compose without compromise (except, occasionally, in their own eyes), and without alibis. I would not claim that they have any monopoly, within current British music, on artistic integrity; but it is more readily perceptible in their work than in most. There are no recantations of 'modernist heresies', no neo-this-or-that crutches; for each of them, art is (to revive some old, but not entirely superannuated Romantic notions) a voyage of discovery of the inner and outer world, not a guided tour of established (alleged) popular attractions. None of them is an 'experimental' composer in the Cageian sense, yet for each of them, composition involves the search for the transcendentalist's 'not-yet-heard' and thus also the element of substantial risk. To this extent they are by no means, as some of their conservative detractors would have it, negators of Western Classical tradition, but its logical inheritors, irrespective of whether or not they wish to be. Adorno's celebrated comment that there is more 'tradition' in a single bar of Webern's Bagatelles than in the whole of Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony holds good for them too, when set beside the current waves of 'neo-Romantics', 'ritualists' and sub-minimalists.

Essentially, also, they are unashamed intellectuals, to the extent that such a designation implies not narrowness, but breadth. Finnissy, it is true, might

reject such a term; but is that not largely an outcome of the 1950s south-of-London grammar school education that I too, as it happens, went through at exactly the same time as him: an education that, as I recollect, scarcely encouraged intellectualist avowals in relation to the arts? In all four composers, it seems to me, one finds different versions of that counterpoint between instinct and reflection, or more crassly, between cerebral and glandular response, that I would regard as the hallmark of the intellectual artist. Helmut Lachemann's impeccable *dictum* that where 'emotional' and 'intellectual' listening to music are at odds, *both* are underdeveloped, is, it seems to me, also applicable without reservation to thinking about music (musicology?) and to composing it; and whatever may separate these composers, I would say that an intellectually secured passion is common to them all.

While on the subject of German musical *dicta*, let us add a third: Hanns Eisler's 'People who only know about music, don't know about that either'. In its historical context, the comment has pronounced social(ist) overtones which, of our four composers, only Richard Barrett would be likely wholly to embrace. Yet at very least, Barrett's comment on Duchamp – that he was 'not particularly interested in what was going on in his own discipline, so he saw it as his business to gain impetus from other artistic disciplines' – probably applies more to these composers than to most of their British contemporaries; and the fact that, in some cases, one could usefully delete the word 'artistic' from that quotation speaks *for* their art, not against it. It is their shared view of music as something which has to come to grips with perspectives far broader than purely 'musical' ones that releases them from the 'social pleasantries' that Barrett perceives (and denounces) in most contemporary music; Dillon's typically Varèsian 'cosmic and sexual' formulation may, at first sight, seem unduly apocalyptic, but it needs to be placed in conjunction with another favourite remark of Varèse (taken from the 19th-century physicist Hoene Wronski), that music is 'the embodiment of the intelligence that exists in sounds'.

Such notions are not, however, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon discourse about music. How, then, shall we locate these composers? As British, as Europeans, or what? Despite their compatibility with the various Germanic views enunciated above, and despite Dillon's passion for Rilke, there is nothing Teutonic about their work, nor is there anything significant in current German music (apart from Ferneyhough pupils like Klause K. Hübler) that remotely resembles it. Dench and Dillon have affinities to certain strands of post-war French philosophy (Foucault in particular) but, apart from a few Grisey/Murail traces in Dillon's later pieces, this preoccupation is unreflected in their music. As for the Italian schools, they are equally untouched by Donatoni's 'artisan' approach, Sciarrino's self-conscious virtuosity, and Bussotti/Sinopoli's neo-Borgia decadence (though there are faint traces of the latter in Dillon's *helle Nacht* – yet despite these 'resemblances', and others alluded to above, Dillon's music is arguably the most ruggedly individual of them all).

So what have they to do with the mainstream (or even the eddies and tributaries) of British music? Unless one interprets the slightly bland periodicity of some of their rhythmic writing (as compared to Ferneyhough's for example) as typical English understatement, the answer must surely be: 'next to nothing'. So what are they? I think the key lies in Dillon's comment:

> I tend to think that one of the reasons I found Xenakis fascinating was that we both come from the fringes of Europe.

The essence of all four composers, I believe, lies in precisely this 'fringe' notion, interpreted not in a negative, self-disparaging sense, but in a positive (albeit somewhat predatory) one. In *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud claims that European theatre can only be revitalised by the radical incursion of non-European conventions and ways of thinking. He had in mind the traditions of Asian theatre; but for our four composers, as it seems to me, Britain too is sufficiently 'remote' for the invasion/assault to be artistically productive.

1 PaulGriffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s* (London: Faber Music, 1985).

2 For example: Richard Toop, 'From Outside Looking in . . .', *New Music 87* ed. Michael Finnissy and Roger Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1987) pp.66-8.

3 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations in this article are from interviews or correspondence with the author.

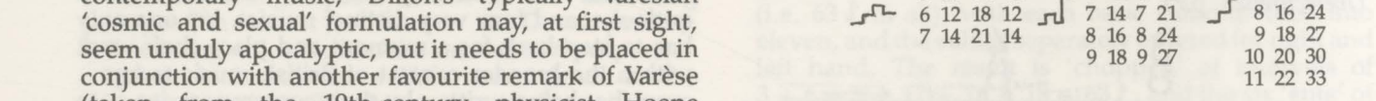
4 Erhard Karkoschka, *Das Schriftbild der Neuen Musik*, (Moeck: Celle, 1966. English Edition, UE, 1972).

5 Brian Ferneyhough's *Transit* was first performed in the Royan Festival, March 1975. The British première was given on 16 November 1977 in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

6 Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music and Other Papers* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987).

7 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p.34 ff.

8 The bar structure of each of the sections has its own metrical 'wave-shape' e.g.



9 From the preface to *Recueillement*.

10 In this essay, as in all my other published work, I use the word 'serial' in the relatively informal way that is common practice among European composers; that is, to designate the integral or *ad hoc* manipulation of arithmetically conceived quantities or proportions within the compositional process. In no case should it be taken as implying the theoretical perspectives of the Columbia-Princeton school.

11 This and the preceding quotation are taken from the composer's programme note.

12 Given the composer's fascination with Beckett, it should perhaps be emphasised that this is simply my interpretation, not his stated intention.

13 Quoted from Barrett's programme note.

14 I am particularly grateful to the composer for supplying very helpful analytical comments on this work.

15 Iannis Xenakis, *Musiques formelles* (Paris: Richard-Masse, 1963).

16 Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950).

17 Amy Clampitt, 'High Culture' from *What the Light Was Like* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986)

18 Roger Wright, 'Breaking Boundaries', *The Listener*, (London: BBC Publications, 29 May 1986), p.30.

19 Published as *Le timbre, metaphores pour la composition* ed. J.B. Barrie (Paris: Christian Bourgeois/IRCAM, 1987).

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EDITION PETERS

JAMES DILLON

MAJOR PERFORMANCES MARCH 1988 – MARCH 1989

... Once Upon a Time for 8 players (1980)
by Music Projects London, at **'Présent Musical d'Orléans'** (Mar. 19) and at **'Upbeat to the Tate'** in **Liverpool** (May 22)
by the Oslo Sinfonietta in **Oslo** (Nov. 27)

Überschreiten for 16 players (1986)
by the Olso Sinfonietta in **Oslo** (May 8 and Nov. 27) and at the **Bergen Festival** (May 25)
by the London Sinfonietta at **Musica '88 Strasbourg** (Sept. 23)

Parjanya-Vata for solo cello (1981)
by Rohan de Saram in **Trieste** (May 23) and at the **Almeida Festival, London** (July 1)

Sgothan for solo flute (1984)
by Pierre-Yves Artaud in **Hiroshima** (May 21) and in **Tokyo** (June 1)
by Céline Nessi in **Paris** (June 4) and **Como** (June 12)

Shrouded Mirrors for solo guitar (1988)
by Magnus Andersson in **Milan** (May 27, 1st performance), **Verona** (May 28) **Darmstadt** (July/Aug.), **Oslo** (Nov. 25), **Spain** and **Australia** (Autumn)

Del Cuarto Elemento for solo violin (1988)
by Irvine Arditti at the **Almeida Festival, London** (July 1, 1st performance), at the **Darmstadt Summer School** (July/Aug.) and at **Musica '88 Strasbourg** (Sept./Oct.)

helle Nacht for orchestra (1987)
by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen at the **Helsinki Biennale** (Mar. 13, 1989)

For further information on the works of James Dillon please contact the **Promotion Department, Peters Edition Ltd., 10-12 Baches Street, London N1 6DN. Tel: 01-251 6732**

Controversies Incorporated

The following four articles are responses to material previously published in Contact. *The first two are prompted by Nicola LeFanu's 'Master Musician: An Impregnable Taboo?'* (Contact 31 *(Autumn 1987), pp.4-8). The others extend the 'composer/performer' debate, including the issue of the notation of time, to which contributions in* Contact 31 *came from Andrew Ball ('Bridging that Gap' pp.27-8), Ivan Moody ('The Mystic's Point of View' pp.28-9) and James Ingram ('The Notation of Time: A reaction to Richard Barrett's Reply' pp.29-30). Further responses are invited to these and other matters raised in* Contact, *and should be sent to Christopher Fox, 3 Old Moor Lane, Dringhouses, York YO2 2QE.*

Diana Burrell

Accepting Androgyny

Nicola LeFanu's article 'Master Musician: an Impregnable Taboo?' is excellent; no stone has been left unturned. The disgraceful statistics she quotes indicate that steps do need to be taken to ensure a more even representation of women and men working as composers. It seems to me that there are two approaches to this, and I understand that the 'Women in Music' organisation (set up last Spring to tackle exactly this kind of issue) is trying both.

One way is to draw the attention of concert promoters, festival directors, the BBC – quietly yet most persistently – to the works of our women composers and ensure that they are placed in programmes. Then let the music speak for itself. The other way is to promote the music more actively, to blow fanfares loudly and announce concerts of pieces by Women Composers. Whilst both approaches may have an effect, by emphasising the second one we run the risk of becoming a 'category': 'Women Composers', like 'Russian-Nationalist Composers', or 'Minimal Composers'.

We should not be seen as a group; probably the only thing we have in common with each other is our gender. The music we write is stylistically very diverse. Judith Weir's music (though I admire it enormously) bears little resemblance to my own. Maconchy's is something else again. Therefore, to build a concert around works all composed by women, with the implication that this factor is enough to connect them, would be akin to promoting a concert of works by, say William Walton, Brian Ferneyhough and Howard Skempton. Personally, I cannot find many musical strands linking these three!

There is also the point that Edward MacDowell once made:[1]

> I write to protest earnestly and strongly against the lumping together of American Composers. Unless we are worthy of being put on programmes with other composers, to stand or fall, leave us alone. By giving such a concert you tacitly admit that we are too inferior to stand comparison with composers of Europe . . .

I do want my music chosen to be played in concerts; I do *not* want it chosen because it was written by a woman.

At the moment, thematic programme-planning seems much in vogue, and a festival director could well seize on the idea of having 'Women Composers' as a theme. However, what appears to be a strongly positive gesture could misfire completely in a following year should a suggestion for performing a particular work by a composer who happens to be female be put forward. 'A woman? No, we did women composers last year; let's do something else. Scandinavians perhaps? Americans?' Rather in the same way that the well-intentioned (though totally unfeminist) idea of wages for housework, a few years back, meant in reality that if a wife were paid for keeping house the man need not so much as lift a finger, our festival director, by promoting one or two concerts with work by female composers in them, might consider that he had 'done his bit' and need never therefore play anything by a woman in the future.

We must take steps to secure performances of our music but, at the same time, we must take only the kind of steps that will not result in our making yet more chains to hold us back. We also need to examine our own attitudes. However many opportunities are made for women, however much positive discrimination is applied, all will be in vain unless we re-assess, with honesty, the way we view our careers. Nicola LeFanu asks why men composers are more successful than women, and what happens to the 'large number of undoubtedly talented young female composers that come to attention during their school and university days?' This is the question that is asked across all the professions. Why is it invariably women who later on become the under-achievers?

For most women (though many of them would deny it) their career does take second place to caring for partner and family and organising a household. When the first child arrives, the female parent will assume, without question usually, that it is her job – even her right – to be the one who may take time off to look after it or, even if she continues working, the one who is able to sit back 'career-wise' – making family responsibilities an excuse for not seeking professional challenges – for a few years. The man's work, out of necessity, then becomes the more important. He becomes the breadwinner, and the woman often re-directs her own energies towards helping his career. I suspect a significant number of talented females have sacrificed their musical gifts to those of their mate.

Whilst it is undoubtedly important to make it possible for women to re-enter their professions later on, it is even more important to create the kind of society in which traditional roles and expectations are fluid, open to change. We who work in the Arts, where work is often on a freelance basis and its pattern therefore irregular, are in a prime position to effect such changes. (Regarding composing competitions, Nicola LeFanu mentions the fact that they are almost

always for composers in their twenties and early thirties, thus excluding women who take time off to have families. Let us press for change here anyway. Many of the best composers, male or female, do not begin to develop properly until later. Why not have competitions without an age-limit? If the prize were to be awarded only to an unpublished manuscript, there would be no risk of its being received by someone established who therefore did not need the exposure.)

We live in a society that is certainly unequal in many ways. One of them is that, although it may now be socially acceptable for a woman to have children and career, it is still not so for a man to care for the children and have no career. He is not yet free to choose either to be the parent at home looking after a family, or to be the partner who perhaps takes on a part-time or undemanding low-paid job in order to help bolster the family's finances. The idea of his refusing to conform to the stereotype of ambitious breadwinner is still, on the whole, considered unfavourably, and it is women in particular who find greatest difficulty in coming to terms with the idea. If the woman is released from her traditional duties, and particularly if the onus is on her to support her family, she must take a real responsibility for her work. In the case of a composer, it becomes vital that commissions are sought, contacts followed up, or teaching-posts clinched. In other words, a woman has, through necessity, to develop a much more positive image of herself as a working person.

All of this requires a considerable degree of courage, but it is essential to challenge stereotypes and traditional patterns of living, and doing so can only be of help to men too. As LeFanu points out, patriarchy is equally bad for them; indeed I know male composers who, because they do not conform to the traditional male image – perhaps they seem rather reserved, don't push themselves forward, appear quiet in their ambitions – are frequently passed over in the way that women are. So let us look first at our own attitudes to our lives and our work, and then make it a priority to create a truly flexible society, so that, for example, the 'remarkable man . . . sufficiently free of conventional ambition' that he is willing to manage his wife's career, and the home and children, in order that she can concentrate fully on her work as a composer, may be encouraged to flourish! Then such an idea will no longer seem strange to us and such a way of living (among others) will become a real option. Women's work, in music as elsewhere, will naturally take its place alongside that of men: the idea of the 'Woman Composer' will become a redundant one.

In all our efforts to redress the balance of the sexes in the field of composition, let us keep in mind that the term 'Woman Composer' is a temporary label – useful to us at the moment perhaps, but to be dropped as soon as possible. In reality, there are only composers, only creative musical minds which order the sounds so that others can play them and listen to them. Some of these minds are housed in female bodies, some in male. Do we really want a situation where, in a concert programme of four pieces, 'two are by women and two by men; in an opera season, three operas by women, three by men'? We surely have to go further than this and create the sort of climate in which it does not matter if, by chance, a whole season's works should be by male composers because, by chance, the ones in a previous season may all have been by women. In other words, I believe that the importance attached to gender must be swept away.

We are all a mixture of masculine and feminine, and if I compose 'out of the wholeness of myself,' then I celebrate not my 'female-ness', but the female and the male polarities within me.

[1] In a letter to Felix Mottl, 13 February 1904, after MacDowell had seen an American Composers' concert advertised in the morning papers.

Rhian Samuel

Women Composers Today: A Personal View

Female composers have been aware for a long time of the sparsity of women's music in concert programmes in this country; Nicola LeFanu's facts and figures generally confirm our worst suspicions. Many have met with some sort of discrimination in education or career, but for those over 40, as LeFanu also confirms, awareness of it generally came slowly. For instance, I recall quite vividly the announcement of one of my teachers, about to hire professional soloists for a university concert: 'Whenever I am offered two instrumental soloists of equal ability, man and woman, I *always* choose the man!' At the age of 21 and 'unenlightened', I was not perturbed. Two years later, as a graduate student in the United States, I was asked by an alert female researcher if I had ever encountered prejudice against women; I said I had not. But the question set me to wondering about the extent of my teacher's bias . . . did it affect his judgement of the soloists' quality in the first place? Besides, he was a powerful man; did it affect other judgements too?

The level of awareness of discrimination against women composers is greater in the 1980s; even so, the situation is still governed by Catch 22. Complaining can be viewed as self-promotion; this is anathema to many women, and so they tend to remain silent. Also, as the establishment is always quick to point out, getting performances is difficult for men too. We could say, as LeFanu does, that those (mostly) men who run the system – concert promoters, BBC producers, publishers, conductors, critics, even performers – must offer women their just voice. But musicians, like sportsmen, shy away from moral reform; such change will not come about of its own volition. A positive move, one might think, has been the formation of 'Women in Music' now celebrating its first anniversary;[1] could it become a strong lobbying-organisation? The group is very diverse; it represents far more interests than simply those of women composers and may already be too diffuse for such single-minded activity.

I believe the route will prove more circuitous. One very real barrier to the success of women composers is female prejudice itself. Women commonly feel inadequate to assume dominant roles over their peers; it is but a small step to project such feelings onto other women. This inadequacy is clearly reflected in our educational system, where the representation of female students in composition-classes (and conducting-classes) is far lower than that of men. But a wind of change is blowing. Women, traditionally outnumbering men in undergraduate music-courses are at some universities (King's London and Reading,

for instance) *required* to enrol in introductory composition-courses. At my own university, Reading, this is leading to a much more equitable representation of women in the elective composition-course during the final year. Women who previously lacked the self-esteem even to try to compose – and show their work to others – have amazed themselves with their ability. The same growth is bound to occur earlier, now that the GCSE syllabus has such a large composition component. Women, tasting what it is like to compose, are becoming interested in – and sympathetic to – what other women accomplish. And when there are as many women composing music as there are men, perhaps the pressure to include women's music will be too great to resist, even in the last bastions of misogyny. *Women in Music* can play an invaluable role here, offering support and raising interest among women themselves.

I do not know the extent to which the presence of women composition-teachers is important in this change; perhaps, compared to the establishment of compulsory courses, it is slight. For instance, Betsy Jolas, teaching at the Paris Conservatoire, admits that in her composition-class (an elective one) the proportions are usually about twelve men to two women. Even so, it may be worth noting that the two British universities with compulsory composition-classes mentioned above are the only ones with female composition-teachers. And Jolas maintains the importance of women as role-models; she attests – as I do – to lacking the courage to describe herself as a composer until she was almost 30 and feels that having a role-model would have helped her in overcoming this.

While in the United States, I grew to know and admire an educational system which emphasises the importance of an extensive and varied base from which quality may emerge. But there, as here, the pyramid system has not been put into operation as far as women composers are concerned. When so many men compose, much of worth must emerge and receive recognition. We need a broad base for women composers too.

[1] Further information about 'Women in Music' can be obtained from Stephanie Power, W.I.M., 32 Hearnville Road, London SW12 8RR.

Margaret Lucy Wilkins

View from the Industrial North

It is my job as a Senior Lecturer in Composition to teach young composers, in itself quite a revolutionary concept since, not so long ago, it was a widely-held belief that composition could not be taught. Though it must be agreed that the teacher cannot endow the student with the combination of musicality, intellect and aural imagination to become a composer (that is the prerogative of a Higher Being), given that pupils with the necessary requisites do present themselves, then a greal deal can be 'taught'. The development of the musical personality, the exploration of the inner self, contact and exchange of ideas with other composers (both peers and the more experienced), expansion of imaginative and intellectual horizons by studying the music of other contemporary composers, problem-solving within a composition, the sheer practicalities of realising musical ideas on paper or tape, the rehearsal of student compositions in workshop situations – all this is included in the art of teaching composition. There is a distinction to be made between students who have the desire to become Composers (with a capital C) and those who include composition as part of their general musical training. I am constantly amazed in my work at Huddersfield Polytechnic by the output of those in the latter category. Coming, as they very often do, from a musical background which did not include composing (though this situation will shortly change when students who have taken the new GCSE music syllabus come through the system), and being confronted by a course which demands that they do compose, these students, after initial apprehension, make great leaps of imagination into the unknown, unlock their musical creativity and produce pieces which sometimes rival those by students in the former category. It is the teacher's task to enable this to happen, both by encouraging students in their own composition and by introducing them to the ideas and techniques of other 20th-century composers.

But what is all this training for? Where does it lead? The educative value of this work is not in question but, at the end of the day, highly intelligent, talented, trained and motivated young composers are being unleashed into a society which is not structured to give them full employment. This is not the case for their instrumental counterparts who can expect to find full- or part-time work in orchestras and ensembles.

Most people, if asked, have no idea how composers earn their living, generally imagining that composers of 'pop' music are rich and that composers of 'un-pop' music are poor. The latter are supposed to spend their twenties (presumably on the dole since there are no 'jobs' for them) writing the works which will be performed frequently enough to earn sufficient royalties to sustain them during their thirties, by which time they should be commanding adequate commissions to sustain them throughout their forties. Their fiftieth-birthday-year celebrations should produce a batch of performances which will carry them on to their sixtieth-birthday-year celebrations, and so to retirement. In practice, this career structure, if such it be, works for a mere handful. Most composers realise all too soon that they are going to have to diversify their activities in order to make ends meet, and certainly if they have dependants to support. Their 'failure' to command the numbers of performances which would provide an adequate living-standard is often unconnected with the quality of their work. In Britain today there is an unprecedented number of highly talented composers in all fields. Proper financial structures simply do not exist that would enable them to direct their gifts and energies into contributing to the cultural and economic wealth of the nation which took so much trouble to educate them. As it is, most composers have to take other work, which inevitably drains their creative energy. Their compositional activity is relegated to a part-time slot, thus making amateurs out of professionals. In which other walk of life is the professional expected to carry out the job, for which they have been so expensively trained, after a hard day's work doing something else? What does Society think (if Society 'thinks' at all) it gains by preventing its members from engaging in the activity which they are best at performing, when that activity

would benefit its cultural and aesthetic life?

Many composers are attracted to lecturing-positions if only because the vacations offer paid time in which to compose. Such employment is in part dishonest however, since firstly the holder of the post is there because of his or her compositional (not lecturing) experience, itself gained in the aforementioned amateur mode; and secondly because the job itself is not to compose as such, but to teach this skill to others!

Living, as I do, in the Industrial North, I have been considering the position of creators in other walks of life – scientists and industrialists. The mental spark, which artists call 'inspiration', is not their sole prerogative, though jealously guarded by them as though it were. It is the same mental activity experienced by inventors in all fields – a sudden leap of the imagination producing a concept which then takes months of painstaking work to bring to fruition. Some artists foster the notion that this inspiration can only take place in a state of near financial ruin! This does not seem to be the case for inventors in other fields. Scientists and industrialists at the forefront of their commercial enterprises work very well in a state of financial security, indeed affluence. Having composed in both financial extremities myself, I know which economic state produces my best music! In the artistic world, Fame is often seen to make up for lack of Fortune. Scientists, though more wealthy, are much more modest about their achievements. (Who was it that invented the wheel, the pill and the micro-chip?) Do Fame and Fortune have to be exclusive; cannot artists and scientists have both?

Many scientists have achieved their state of financial security because industrial companies employ them, on a good permanent salary with pension, to generate ideas for products for the firm to manufacture and market at home and abroad. Without these design-engineers the company would only be able to produce goods from the existent moulds. Obviously in this sphere of activity it is felt necessary to maintain a steady output of new designs, new products, improved formulae, and to employ the best available minds to ensure that this can happen – not so artistic companies. Where are the orchestras, art galleries, theatre-, dance- and opera-companies which engage teams of playwrights, artists, or composers on a permanent full-time basis to ensure the ongoing creative vitality of their art? It is a hopeful sign that recently the National Theatre Company, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra have employed composers on just such schemes. Though these projects are embryonic in terms of the duration of employment, and miniscule salaries are offered, it can be hoped that they will be developed into meaningful livelihoods for the artists concerned.

All too often composers see themselves as individuals working against Society. The many composers I know are generous, responsible, assiduous and have great integrity in their attitude to their art. There seems little point in alienating this group of people by ignoring them in practical and economic terms. It is not surprising that some of them respond with alienated music (though this is not an argument in favour of 'cosy' music). Working on a secure basis as members of a team consisting of planners, composers, performers, conductors, copyists, recording technicians and marketeers is an unknown situation for them, though this is the *modus operandi* for their scientific counterparts. The technological revolution which has taken place this century has been effected by fully-employed scientists. Some of their creations have been far from 'cosy', and whilst some have added to the quality of life, others have been inhuman.

It is often maintained that the artistic product is difficult to 'sell' and is completely dependent on the taste of the somewhat conservative consumer. However, clever marketeers have successfully sold a variety of 'difficult' products to equally conservative customers. Ten years ago, for example, the computer was not a widely owned artefact. It is not even a particularly inexpensive or 'easy' concept, yet nowadays no office, or even home, can apparently function without one. The social value of music is often judged in terms of the numbers of people to whom it appeals, though even in industry, the commercial value of a product is not necessarily judged by the numbers of people who can buy it. Take transport as an example. Many individuals own cars; companies, rather than individuals, own buses, trains and air-liners (some are also state-owned); and, at the pinnacle of transportation, rockets for the exploration of outer space are corporately owned (in the USA) by state and company. Comparably, there are musics which appeal to the many; other musics which are appreciated by the artistically aware; and at the forefront of research and devlopment is music which will only interest the connoisseur. There is nothing wrong with this state of affairs. It is a natural pyramid. But, just as the various modes of vehicular transport are designed and manufactured within a viable economic framework, so must be all modes of musical transport. The annual Oxbridge 'milk-round' searches out the brightest young minds and lures them into the financial/business world with salaries which make their parents gasp! Where are the Arts Organisations – needful as any others of managers and financiers – on these 'milk-rounds'?

Ironically, it is just at this moment that industrialists are finding life difficult. Redundant design-engineers are finding themselves in the same freelance-market situation as artists. The slogan 'Buy British' never did apply to artistic products. Consequently, artists have learnt to accept competition from abroad, in addition to that from the dead! Every piece of work has to be fought for on a one-off basis. The individual has to conceive, produce and sell each item in isolation. Unfortunately it seems that scientists are becoming more like artists in their work situation, rather than the other way round, and we are in danger of ending up with the worst of both worlds.

This is a time of social change. Many of the 'old orders' are being questioned and undermined, some with justification, others not. Let us hope that the situation for artists can be made to improve. An intelligent society capitalizes on the talents of its people rather than ignoring them. Currently there is no vision, no political will to harness the artistic talents of the nation to the economy of the nation. The state art-funding body is being whittled away, not to be replaced by a better system, but to be replaced by nothing. This must not be allowed to happen. Aesthetic values are high in this country. The quality and quantity of the intelligentsia is increasing. There is a wealth of creative talent, an increasing appreciation of cultural experiences and an educated public. In this climate, it must be possible to devise financial structures which will enable artists to make their contributions to Society without debilitating personal financial worries. Investment in this area can be made

to produce both economic and cultural wealth. Constructive thinking and financial expertise must be directed at this problem and, if proper solutions are found, my job as a Senior Lecturer in Composition will seem more purposeful, and the young composers emerging from their musical education can have a future working *for* Society rather than *against* it.

Trevor Wishart

Performance, Notation, Time

Music is an experience in sound. What is important (from a compositional point of view) is the relationship between the composer's intentions and the listener's aural experience as mediated by the performer. In fact, the performer may be the (instantaneous) composer of the music, or there may be neither score nor performer (as in some tape-music or studio-produced rock). A composer's ability should be measured in terms of his or her capacity to mould this aural experience. The notated text, where it exists, is a means to an end and not an end in itself, except in some academic circles.

With text-based music, performance difficulty is only valid up to the point where the intelligent listener can tell that the performer's effort is making a difference to the musical experience. In this context, the intelligent listener should be taken to include a very much wider group than those persons who have just spent the last three years writing a PhD thesis on the composer in question. By the musical experience is meant the *aural experience* of the music *and* something more than that; not just the observation that what is in the text has, or has not, been played.

This distinction is important from the point of view of the performer. Why should a performer bother to struggle with a difficult or complex notational procedure if it makes no difference to the audience when they don't get it quite right (or even when they get it completely wrong)? (Among a small circle of devotees there is the question af musical *machismo* – *A* is *the* performer who can actually perform the notations in *B*'s piece – but this is a somewhat parochial concern.)

It is also important from the point of view of compositional methodology. 'Making a difference' does not mean merely that, following the *text*, one notices whether the performer played E flat instead of D, or *fffffff* instead of *ffffff*, but that in playing these deviations from the text a significant change in the musical experience took place. If it did not, then any rigorous procedure used to derive that E flat or *fffffff* marking in the score is not a *necessary* one – though it may be a *sufficient* one – in relation to the musical experience engendered.

Such consideration begs the question of what constitutes a significant change in the musical experience. If the latter is to be *defined* in terms of the notated text then any deviation from that text will necessarily alter it . . . but this is mere tautology. There has to be some definition of musical experience which transcends its description in terms of the contents of a score, for any meaningful discussion of this issue to take place. Otherwise the text-composer is free to define any of his/her notations as a valid musical experience, and musical discussion comes down to an argument about the rigorousness of competing text-writing methods.

Taking the argument one step further, analysis of music should best consist of:

a) Analysing the aural experience of the music in great detail, without ever seeing the score or reading about the composer's intentions.
b) Only then looking at the score and investigating the composer's methodology.
c) Comparing the perceived aural structure of the music with the composer's methodology, and ascertaining whether the composer's approach is *i*) sufficient and *ii*) necessary to account for the aural experience.

Only in this way can any objective assessment of the composer's methodology be made. Unfortunately much contemporary analysis seems to equate its task with uncovering the composer's methodology as evidenced in the notational procedures used; this is, no doubt, an interesting occupation, but it is text-methodology analysis, not *music* analysis.

The result tends to be ideological debate about whether methodology *A* is superior to methodology *B*, and it becomes a matter of definition or belief as to which direction is to be favoured. This 'idealist' (in the philosophical sense) approach to musical matters makes for lots of verbally weighty articles in journals, and reputations rise and fall upon it.

My semi-empirical approach (anathema!) would first ascertain whether, and to what extent, the compositional procedure was *valid* (i.e. either sufficient or necessary to the perceived musical experience) before making any judgement about its value. This approach again raises the difficult problem of explaining how to define what 'works' or 'makes a difference' about a musical experience. A simple, but intellectually annoying, answer would be that being a musician involves having an intuitive insight into at least some aspects of this question (though that insight might be restricted by social conditioning and therefore need to be tempered by a very wide and generous approach to musical study). A more intellectually satisfying answer may be that the solution lies in the realm of human physiology/psychology, human history and social/environmental experience. We can learn from the existing musical traditions of the world, from a study of psycho-acoustics and from much else. The matter is not, however, purely one of *definition*.

The question of the notation of time is also closely related to this issue. What matters about a particular time-structure is that which we experience. To discuss this very briefly: if there are no markers within the *aural* experience for us to perceive *specific* complex relationships of pulse taking place, (for example, clearly established and repeating pulse-accents in different tempi, as in my *VOX-3)* then we will forego such a *specific* perception, and experience only a sense of the absence of pulse - a certain sense of scatter or dislocation, or something else.

We lose perceptual detail at the lowest level and jump to a higher level of the grouping of events to look for patterning. This musical experience can be replaced quite happily *in its fine details* by one closely similar without making any qualitative difference, and in such a case we should choose the notational procedure and the grouping of note-values (through barring, for example) which is easiest to read and/or realise. All else is merely the ideology of textual-method.

This approach requires a certain candour from 'text-composers' about their capabilities. It is unfortunately an easy and intellectually respectable activity to hide behind an ideology of method and accuse the performer of inadequacy, or the listener of having cloth ears.

Linda Hirst

Extending Singers

Jane Manning, *New Vocal Repertory: an Introduction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), £29.50 (hardback), £9.95 (paperback).

What an ideal situation it would be if singing-teachers in Britain were to have Jane Manning's book *New Vocal Repertory: an Introduction* and were to recommend the chosen pieces of music carefully to their students. Her enthusiasm is undimmed after more than twenty years of performing new music, and her obvious commitment to each one of the pieces she describes should be infectious enough to make singers (for whom the book is clearly intended) take note of her comments, and, if necessary, make contact with composers so as to obtain their songs, thus beginning a quest for new repertoire and an ever-widening approach to programme-planning for recitals. They would then feel a personal involvement with the music and begin to understand more about the compositional process and how vital this is to their own musical future.

The book is clear in its layout, clear in its writing and just as clear in its suggestions for programme-planning. There are no wasted words, and the musical quotations illustrate invitingly. The gradings of difficulty that are given to the chosen pieces further clarify the author's aims – to encourage performance of this music – provided that the singer has a real awareness of his or her own technical and interpretive ability. The list of works is comprehensive and impressive within its limits, and every range and type of voice is catered for. My main criticism, however, is of the discrepancy between the book's title and its contents. Indeed, until I obtained my copy I was expecting something quite different. It deals exclusively with songs for voice and piano in the English language, a very small segment of the new vocal repertory, and if it were to be these songs, as the publishers suggest, which might serve the singer as an *introduction* to contemporary vocal music, then the situation would be regrettable. Such an introduction should come well in advance of the music discussed in this book, sowing the seeds of interest and curiosity, since new music develops out of a previous generation of writing.

I may be doing singers a disservice when I lump them together as a breed and ask: Do they know about Schoenberg? About the departure from tonality? About what was going on in England in the earlier part of this century? Of Peter Warlock's life and music? When will they ask questions about *music* rather than about their voices? When will they be as curious about the composer and his or her motivation to write as about their own motivation to sing a piece? Of course I know that there are singers who are aware of these things, but I still feel that there are many more who are not. I think it unlikely that a singer unfamiliar with Britten and Tippett operas, late Stravinsky, or the Second Viennese School would even want to update his or her recitals, whereas a singer who knows a living composer or two (personally or musically) has a different outlook.

Maybe the author optimistically assumes a background knowledge in her readers which would lead them to the music on which the book focusses, but I think singers would also be interested to read of earlier pieces which they may know only slightly and might study further if encouraged. Jane Manning's descriptions of important earlier-20th-century works would make inspiring reading. Singers would love to know of her experiences performing Schoenberg, Berio, Nono, Henze, Weill or Ives, for example. There is a real need for something to be written about such earlier and more frequently-heard music, and one might perhaps hope for this in a future volume.

On the whole, better-established figures are left out of the present book, as the author feels that the composers who *are* included deserve more performances. (There are several to whom she refers as neglected.) The problem may be for young singers to choose a composer on whose work to devote their attention. This, of course, is a matter of personal taste and selection – a difficult problem for students who have been taught to be afraid of, or worse, scornful of new music in general. Jane Manning's recommendations may be sufficient as they stand, but I would have liked more information about the composers chosen, a brief word on their backgrounds beyond just birthdate and nationality. A criterion in my own choice of recital music would be familiarity with other areas of the composers' music, (though this might be hard to acquire in the case of some personalities discussed in the book). Whilst I would be happy to see such composers as Gunther Schuller, Virgil Thomson, Judith Weir and Trevor Hold, for example, included in standard recital-programmes, I am less sure about some of the others mentioned.

Taste aside, the author is always incisive and objective, as well as most effectively descriptive in her guidelines on performance, though a few more personal touches would have made for friendlier reading: she rarely refers to her own experiences of performing the songs other than to say what a pleasure she found it. Singers need to know that an artist of Jane Manning's calibre and experience can struggle with a certain section of music for some time. Certainly, if I count the hours taken to learn a particularly taxing new piece and pass this information on to students, they are relieved to hear that it didn't happen overnight, and that increased musicianship can gradually result from the learning of new and complicated songs or pieces written in unfamiliar notation.

It is in its consideration of this latter kind of music that the book is most valuable. It was, of course, Cathy Berberian who transformed composers' ideas of vocal writing from the 1950s onwards (though Bernard Rands is the only composer included who actually wrote for her). She was a pioneer in the breaking down of stylistic barriers; suddenly all the sounds a voice could make were being written down in various forms of notation, and musical use of the voice did not always depend on the *bel canto* technique. Now as composers continue to explore new areas of colour and timbre in the voice, so a vocal technique must encompass new abilities and new sounds; there must be an awareness of the relationship of voice to instruments, though always the voice must first be capable of producing a sustained and well-supported sound which can be beautiful when necessary.

Certain other technical skills are a prerequisite when following the advice given in the book, and the author's suggestions when dealing with such matters

are always direct and helpful. The discussion of David Bedford's *Come in here child*, for example, is of great practical assistance; all fears of starting the piece on a soft high B are dispelled by clear instruction, followed by the encouraging advice that once the perfect start has been achieved, no further problems occur in the opening phrase. Vocal sound-quality is also discussed in some detail here, including special effects and singing into a microphone (a vast area for discussion), and one hopes that Manning's comments may serve to encourage some adventurous young sopranos to learn this lovely piece.

But how depressing it is, as the author points out in her introduction (p.2), that singing-teachers often feel that their students are 'not advanced enough to sing modern music'. When will they be ready? Surely it should always be there alongside the standard repertoire, to be learned, got 'into the voice', and respected in exactly the same way as a Mozart aria which the student has probably heard sung by all her superiors and peers. The joy of learning a piece of new music is partly that one cannot sit for hours discussing its problems with other singers; it becomes one's own problem to solve, perhaps with the help of the composer, and the excitement of performing music that not many others have sung before should help enormously in the development of the performer's own personality. But how does a young singer, or even an experienced artist, create or develop this sense of taste without being familiar with a great deal of new music and therefore, as Jane Manning says, being able to 'indulge in intellectual or philosophical argument about their repertory' (p.2)? The author so rightly claims that of all performing-artists, singers are the least inclined to do this; surely this is because they listen to voices, and to singers, but not so frequently to *music*.

Another question which seems to merit further discussion is whether the standard 'voice and piano' recital remains a suitable medium for the presentation of new music. I see no reason why it should not, but I am sure that I have colleagues who would disagree. Perhaps the way for singers to introduce new music to their public is to include one new piece in each recital of standard repertoire, and hope that the audience's safety-curtain of prejudice will fail to come down before the piece begins.

To the extent that it at least promotes interest in the consideration of such matters, Jane Manning's book makes an excellent addition to a library, a necessary addition to the reference books of singing-teachers, and an interesting volume for singers themselves, from which they may gain an enormous amount of information, not just about the chosen music, but about performance attitudes, pacing a recital, technical and musical issues, and the ability to construct a well balanced and exciting programme for themselves. Ideally one might hope for a series of master-classes to follow it in which the author could personally guide young singers through their selected pieces, further demonstrating her conviction that delving into new repertory can be a fulfilling and exciting experience.

Susan Bradshaw

Boulez and the Modern Concept

Peter F. Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (London: Scolar Press, 1987), £35

A lot of care has gone into the production of a book that would do credit to any well-endowed coffee table: its designer lay-out is printed on good-quality paper, unstintingly used to provide wide margins, an abundance of music-examples, diagrams (some of them too simplistic to be helpful), and all the poetry ever set by Boulez together with complete translations where applicable. The pleasing visual effect is only slightly spoilt by the fact that the manuscript music-examples – some rather crudely copied and not all in the same hand – are printed in a format disproportionately larger than the rest. Of its 143 pages (excluding selected work list, not fully up-dated, brief bibliography and index), only an estimated 85 or so form the actual text: £35 seems a considerable price to pay for what is in effect an extended essay.

Or rather, a collection of essays. It is not the author's fault that the dust jacket has BOULEZ writ large and the actual title, 'Boulez and the Modern Concept', disguised as an explanatory sub-heading. Dr. Stacey is impressively well-read around his subject. As an art historian he casts interesting light on the artistic mores of our time relative to one of its most innovative composers, drawing together the threads of 20th-century artistic endeavour as stated by the artists themselves and presenting them – as all good coffee-table books should – in easily digestible form.

Chosen to illustrate the influence of music on painting and poetry and – from Boulez's point of view – the other way about, a wide range of relevant quotations from those listed below are linked by commentary and paraphrase and grouped under chapter-headings that set Boulez within the context of his times: abstract art (Kandinsky, Klee and Mondrian), serial music (Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, Messiaen and Stravinsky), dramatic art (Artaud, Genet and Beckett) and, at much greater length (about half the total), poetry (Char and Mallarmé) – with specific reference to Boulez's vocal music. While not uninteresting as a subject in itself, it seems odd to devote the final quarter of a book ostensibly about Boulez to post-1945 text-setting in general, with examples from Ligeti, Berio, Birtwistle, Henze, Nono, Stockhausen and the concrete poets Gomringer, Döhl and Emmet Williams. At this point the overall aim of the book becomes confused in more ways than one: not even the amateur browser needs to be told that, 'Before a composer can commence a text-setting, he must choose the text or texts with which he is going to work', and that 'A great many different types of text are available to him'. A brief section on electronic music and the voice, included in this chapter, seems to allow Dr. Stacey to feel exempt from discussion of *Répons* (1980-), Boulez's work-in-progress, and any mention of developments at IRCAM later than 1977.

Whether Boulez himself had read quite so widely at the time he is credited with the all-round artistic awareness outlined in Dr. Stacey's introductory

chapters is open to question: most of his remarks on the subject of music in relation to the other arts were made retrospectively and, even then, he was to speak more of subjective inspiration – of sudden, mind-blowing experiences – than of any reasoned determination to be part of an artistic movement. Boulez's concerns in the Paris of the 1940s were, I suspect, strictly musical – much more so than were Schoenberg's in the Vienna of the 1900s; it was only towards the end of the 1950s that Mallarmé's typographical and formal innovations (together with the persuasive influence of John Cage, not mentioned by Dr. Stacey in this connection) were directly to affect his own ideas on form in *Pli selon Pli* and the Third Piano Sonata.

In any case, Dr. Stacey's research shows that painters and poets were able to make much more direct use of specifically musical concepts than were composers of visual or literary ones: poetry may indeed suggest music, but music can only absorb poetry as a part of itself. For this reason alone, he should be on much stronger ground when discussing the influence of other composers. Nevertheless his first music-example (curiously giving the twelve-note row from Webern's Concerto opus 24 followed by the opening bars of the Symphony opus 21) is misleadingly linked to the opening of Boulez's First Piano Sonata in order to show the greater variety of intervals it uses – while failing to mention that, as Charles Rosen points out [1], the latter derives from the sequential repetition of a four-note group: F sharp-D-F-E flat, E-C-E flat-D flat, D-B flat-C sharp-B. Extracts from Boulez's own writings are given to illustrate his attitude to the three Viennese composers during the early part of his career, and these are linked by a summary of his ideas relating both to them and to the rhythmic innovations of Stravinsky and Messiaen. (Four times in foot-notes at this point and in the index mention is made of a composer called Michel Faro – evidently a careless mistake, since so many consecutive misprints of the name Fano would seem unlikely. Otherwise the book is unusually error-free, so that a wrongly copied time signature in Example 14 – as 7/16 instead of 9/16, and a C natural copied as a quaver instead of a semiquaver in the previous bar of the same example – ought to have been corrected, as also should the spelling of the work listed as *Dévive* [*Dérive*]).

None of the musical influences listed earlier are followed up in the long chapter on Boulez's word-setting. Here, Dr. Stacey tiptoes up to the threshold of the music itself but quickly retreats to a fringe discussion of formal frameworks rather than content, of verbal imagery rather than the music itself. There is little to be gleaned as to why the music is what it is in terms of harmonic structure, let alone what it sounds like. While it is interesting to know that Char's poem *La Sorgue* is sub-titled 'chanson pour Yvonne' (I didn't), it seems perverse to illustrate the word-setting of *Le Soleil des eaux* with examples taken from the long-superseded 1958 version: at least one of his examples reads quite differently in the 1965 score. Again, he refers to the 'elements of indeterminacy' that make 'Improvisation III' from *Pli selon pli* the only one of the three to do full justice to its title, without mention of the fact that it has since been revised (1983-4) to exclude these elements – an omission that in turn leads him to say that Boulez sets only the first three lines of the Mallarmé sonnet (no longer true).

Since none of the works discussed by Dr. Stacey was written later than 1970 (although passing mention is made of . . . *explosante – fixe* . . ., 1971), the book gives the impression of being curiously out of date. And since the author's preface and acknowledgements are dated 1986, even the vagaries of publication dates do not seem to excuse the fifteen-year time-lag.

In order to promote his thesis that poetry played a large part in the development of Boulez's musical style, Dr. Stacey necessarily concentrates on the vocal works, but to discuss these mainly in terms of what he calls 'the various techniques of vocal emission' (rather than to explore – as he much more interestingly suggests in passing – the creation of independent musical forms) is to evade the issue. His superficial foray into the outskirts of analysis might have been more purposefully pursued with reference to Robert Piencikowsky's analytical study of *Le Marteau sans maître*[2] – not even listed in the bibliography: is it really true to say that, 'Although the length of the notes (in 'Bourreaux de solitude') is determined by serial procedures, the placing of the notes is governed by aesthetic considerations'? Much more likely, I think, is that they were governed by procedures supposedly explained in the enigmatic Example 4 from *Boulez on Music Today*.[3]

To conclude that 'Boulez was influenced by the rigour of Neo-Plastic art to create a musical language that was self-sufficient and made no reference to foregoing principles of organisation' (p. 141, a remark that has immediately to be qualified by a footnote excepting the influences of the Viennese composers, Messiaen and Stravinsky) is altogether too glibly dismissive of Boulez's importance at the forefront of a musical development that retains as much as it rejects of the recent past. To regard his achievements purely in terms of poetic reflection is to deny musical reality. When all is said and done, Boulez makes use of poetry for his own strictly musical ends – twisting it into shapes suggestive of musical functions as a basis for his abstract sound-structures. As far as the listener is concerned (and no matter what the composer himself may have said by way of a *postieri* explanation), these structures might just as well be in the form of a pear as in the form of a sonnet . . . neither of which has much relevance to the experience of music as it is heard.

[1] In his 1975 article on Boulez's piano music included in *Pierre Boulez, A Symposium* (London: Ernst Eulenberg, 1986).

[2] Robert Piencikowsky, 'Le Marteau sans maître', *Schweizer Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft*, (Bern and Stuttgart: Verlag Paul Paupt, 1980).

[3] Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, translated by Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

Keith Potter

Zagreb Music Biennale 1987

Fourteenth International Festival of Contemporary Music, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 9-17 April 1987

Visiting a foreign country for a contemporary music festival, especially for the first time, naturally arouses a curiosity about the new music of that country. When I first went to Yugoslavia in 1981, for the eleventh Zagreb Music Biennale, I not only heard much more music by Yugoslav composers than I'd ever done before but also acquired some scores, books and other material, interviewed several of the major figures and generally tried to immerse myself for the week, if not in 'Yugoslav culture' as a whole – for that is impossible in such a divided country – then at least in the Croatian culture of Zagreb itself. In particular, I returned from that first trip seven years ago bearing a heavy pile of recordings of some 60 pieces by Yugoslavs. I had decided that I should write not only about the Biennale but also about the development and current state of Yugoslav music. In the end, I composed a long review which discussed both the festival itself and the local composition scene, promising that we would in the future come up with something more extensive on new music in Yugoslavia.[1]

Since then I've returned twice to Zagreb and, as a result of these visits, I have been able to expand my understanding of both the festival and the Yugoslav new-music scene more generally. It is, though, far from easy to obtain the basic research material for any thorough assessment of this country's music since 1945, or even since 1961, the year of the first Zagreb Biennale which, like the advent of Poland's Warsaw Autumn festival in 1956, signalled the effective beginning of the local modern movement. Besides, the Biennale is not, despite its importance, the best place to set about such research, at least as far as the programmes themselves are concerned. The festival is not designed to perform quite the same function for Yugoslav music as the annual Warsaw Autumn week does for contemporary Polish composition. For a real immersion in the local product, I'm told, one needs to go to the festival of new Yugoslav music, much of it by younger composers, that is held each autumn in Opatija. I visited this beautiful and famous seaside resort in what is commonly called Istria, quite close to Italy, on holiday in 1986, but I have yet to get to the Opatija festival itself. Zagreb's Biennale is deliberately international, or at any rate as international as Yugoslavia's parlous economy can make it these days. It is really more a 'window out' than a 'window in', and it is perhaps this which chiefly justifies its place on the international contemporary music festival circuit, less prestigious though that place may be nowadays.

Like all festivals, the Zagreb Biennale has had its ups and downs. Even in 1981 I was being told by festival veterans that there were now fewer events and simply less excitement than in previous years, and I attempted to deal with the outsider's possible responses to such an assertion when I wrote my earlier review. In 1983 I made unsuccessful efforts to find out when the festival was on and what it contained and, having dismally failed, didn't go. This illustrates the problems of communication involved: though it is always difficult for foreign festivals without a sizeable promotion budget to reach those who might be interested, it did seem odd that the Yugoslav embassy in London, for instance, simply couldn't help me. But in any case the 1983 event appears to have been poorly planned and executed, and this led to the decision to pull all the stops out for 1985, when no fewer than four major international composers – Berio, Cage, Penderecki and Xenakis – were invited as well as many less prestigious ones, and an academic conference was attached to the festival for, I think, the first time.

Three things about the thirteenth Biennale in 1985 still seem worth saying now. First, it was in many respects a good festival, bringing together more major figures from the fast-ageing avant garde than even much richer festivals are usually able to do these days, even if it didn't do enough, in my opinion, to provide a good international conspectus of work by younger composers, especially those under 40. Second, the three-day symposium, entitled 'Compositional Syntheses of the Eighties', which was run in conjunction with the festival offered one of the rare opportunities to discuss contemporary composition at the sort of length and depth taken for granted by our academic colleagues in more historical fields; the fact that it set out to talk about the present situation – rather than, say, the sixties or some other such recent period already vaguely dignified by the passage of time – is remarkable if not unique. The results – published the following year in both Croatian and the mixture of other languages used on the occasion (much of the publication is in English) – are not especially illuminating, neither do they make very coherent reading; much of the transcription and translation work, from spoken as well as written source material, is understandably error-ridden. But the book does at least provide some record of an all too rare attempt to create an international academic dialogue on the subject of new music.[2] Third, the 1985 Biennale helped to broaden and deepen my knowledge of both Croatian and other Yugoslav music; I'll include some comment on this below.

By 1987 annual inflation in Yugoslavia had reached the horrendous level of around 75% or worse, causing both practical and psychological problems which are very hard for us to comprehend. It was my understanding that the 1987 Biennale only managed to exist at all, or at least to mount the range of events it did, because of a happy accident. That summer the International Student Games were being held in Zagreb; half the city seemed to have been reduced to a building site as a result, since sufficient city and republic government funds had been found to do some extensive renovation for such a prestigious international occasion. (I was glad I'd been to Zagreb before, or I'd have been dreadfully disappointed by what I saw.) It appeared that the Biennale had somehow been able to acquire some kind of spin-off funding from this major effort of local cultural flag-waving. All the same, there was obviously no prospect of repeating the scale of the 1985 event, and when I last heard, the fate of the 1989 Biennale looked pretty grim.

The fourteenth Biennale had the same artistic director (the composer Stanko Horvat) and programme secretary (the musicologist Nikša Gligo) as the previous festival; only the third member of the executive committee had changed (Marija Božić rather than Eva Sedak, who in 1985 was also responsible for the symposium). The broad layout remained the same as in previous years, with two main events each

evening preceded by a five o'clock presentation, usually of films. (There was also a Sunday morning recital which, like all the events of the opening weekend, I missed, not being able to arrive before Monday.) The main venue was, as before, the Lisinski concert-hall building, a short walk from the railway station but in the new part of Zagreb; its Concert Hall and Chamber Hall, and even on occasion its foyers, have provided adequate, if occasionally ill-suited, spaces for many of the concerts in the years I've been attending the festival. Most of the other events took place, again as usual, in the old town, though not in the official 'old town' that is to be found a steep climb or funicular ride away above the main area of the present city, and whose medieval and baroque churches and other buildings are still Zagreb's leading tourist attraction. There is the splendid if rather resonant recital-hall of the old Croatian Music Institute, the Gavella Theatre (the latter mainly used for late-night events) and, for the rare evenings of opera or ballet, the beautifully restored Croatian National Theatre; the Students' Centre in the new part of Zagreb is used for the films and occasionally for other events. Audiences, often young, never filled the large Lisinski hall but were sometimes vigorously enthusiastic.

While the 1985 Biennale had been dominated by the quartet of famous names already mentioned, the festival of 1987 had to be content with just one senior avantgardist: Mauricio Kagel. I admit to being ambivalent both about the representation of such major figures in contemporary music festivals and about Kagel himself these days. Taking the former first: on the one hand, I am worried by the extent to which so many festivals rely on these famous names – there can't be more than twenty of them, and their numbers will necessarily dwindle with the passage of time. Their presence, which leads naturally to their dominance, not only emphasises the extent to which most such festivals still foster the aesthetic ideals of a modernism that many now regard as dated; it also means that the work of younger composers gets less attention, both in the sense that fewer of their works actually get performed (as I've already said was the case in 1985) and in the way that the music of anyone under 50 or even under 60 can easily find itself perceived these days as something automatically less important. (Think of how the works of Kagel or Boulez or Cage were perceived when *they* were in their thirties or even twenties.) On the other hand, I would miss the excitement that can be engendered by a 'major presence' and the chance to think again about, as well as simply catch up on, the music and ideas of people one has respected from afar for a long time and in truth probably still encounters all too seldom in the flesh. Presumably quite a lot of others feel this too; the likelihood that these famous names will attract more of an audience must be a factor in the decision to have them, and no festival planner can be blamed for this. All the same, the merry-go-round has been going round for a long time now with the same figures on it; and metaphors of the fairground or circus, by no means new to the new-music scene anyway, don't get more palatable with age.

Kagel on his own was obviously far less dominating at Zagreb in 1987 than the four had been in 1985; his compositions and his ideas in any case encourage thoughtful appraisal rather than subjugation. My ambivalence here – mulled over during a week which offered half-a-dozen pieces in live performances plus, crucially, Kagel films almost every day at five o'clock and an interview with the composer – centred on the changes in his work in recent years. On the positive side, for me, there is the composer's continuing ability to question received cultural notions and to work those notions subversively into his own compositions in ways which will disturb. He continues for this reason to take the music of the past as starting points for compositions; and whether it is Bach or Beethoven – as with some famous earlier pieces such as *Ludwig Van* – or Borodin and Stravinsky – as with the strangely titled *Fürst Igor, Strawinsky*, premiered in Venice in 1982 – the results always cause the listener to reassess his or her own position towards the past and its present use. In these post-modern times, Kagel seems fresher, a lot more relevant, than many of his erstwhile avant-garde colleagues, whose status he was always calling into question anyway. The confusion one has, in *Fürst Igor, Strawinsky*, over what is Stravinsky and what is Kagel – to say nothing of how to deal with the composer's own programme note's reference to Borodin's *Prince Igor* (it turns out that the Russian text is actually taken from the opera) – is actually a nice illustration of the post-modern dilemma. The two programmes devoted entirely to Kagel, one conducted by the composer, also offered *10 Märsche, Variété* and *Finale mit Kammerensemble* and were performed by both Italian and Yugoslav musicians, including the bass Boris Carmelli; it was a pity that the local string quartet did not manage to offer the Second Quartet as well as the First, but at least these compositions are now quite old, if not exactly familiar.

On the negative side, there is Kagel's own institutionalised status: something which one can easily argue he can't do anything about (except stop writing, possibly), but which compromises his position. The subverter is himself subverted, I suppose. Perhaps he is the joker, or the wise fool, on the avant-garde festival merry-go-round that I mentioned earlier, but since these days it's no longer clear, despite the 'famous names' syndrome, just who the real kings are, jokers can ascend the throne quietly when one isn't looking. And there's also another sense in which one isn't *looking* any more, or at least not as much as one used to. Kagel hasn't entirely deserted either theatre or film, the media which have made him so much what he is and which made those five o'clock retrospective sessions in Zagreb so essential. He has, for example, fairly recently written music, or perhaps more accurately a sound-track, for Buñuel's famous *Un chien andalou*; music whose inclusion of the sound of a real dog is but one illustration of how the composer once again challenges our ideas – in this case, of the nature of symbolism as well as what constitutes incidental music. Zagreb didn't offer either much *very* recent work or much hard information on what the composer is doing now. But there seems to be a move away from theatrical concerns and a return to concert pieces without a strong theatrical element: to pieces, indeed, that deal with pitches and rhythms in a way which invites an almost old-fashioned response. But no doubt this is the subverter getting his revenge for being subverted; we shall see.

Kagel's *Rrrrrr...* for organ (1980-81) – another work focusing on the dislocation of familiar styles, in this case an especially delightful discourse largely on popular forms the names of which begin with the letter 'r' – provided the link between the Biennale's Kagel theme and the festival's other interesting project. The organist and composer Zsigmond Szathmáry, Hungarian by birth and now resident in Freiburg,

played the Kagel piece in a recital on the Lisinski Concert Hall organ. In addition, he had been invited to make a *Work in Progress* of his own during the festival, building up the layers of his piece by taping public performances of various versions of it during three earlier festival events on three different organs (one actually in Ljubljana) before he got to the final mix in his Lisinski recital. I only heard the final version. The effect was less impossibly dense than I'd feared it would be, despite Szathmáry's rather unimaginative use of the spatial possibilities provided by the six loudspeakers ranged around the hall. *Work in Progress (final version)* used gongs played by a perambulating assistant as well as a wide range of organ sounds, and it was both effectively varied and formally coherent as a whole. It felt, though, like what I suppose it was doomed to be: an occasional piece that for those involved with it must have been simultaneously a nightmare and fun to do.

There was quite a lot else to hear, and even to see, in Zagreb's fourteenth Biennale week, particularly from countries of the Eastern bloc with which, though itself non-aligned, Yugoslavia has strong cultural connections. A late-night presentation by the Czech 'laser optophonic group' Via Crucis, for example, was quite awful, I thought, in its crudity and datedness; but it at least demonstrated that some kind of experimental work is going on in a country from which we still tend to hear only symphonies and tone poems of impeccably Socialist-Realist unexceptionability. The Hungarian Amadinda Percussion Quartet, on the other hand, brought a lively programme of Cage, Reich and their own works. And its better-known Russian counterpart, the Mark Pekarsky Percussion Ensemble, brought an even more entertaining and slickly presented programme mixing pieces from the USSR and the USA, which functioned as a live follow-up to the presentations of an interesting and commendably wide range of Soviet compositions on audio tape and video which a delegation from the Union of Soviet Composers mounted on three mornings during the festival. On the final evening, our own Elgar Howarth conducted the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra in a programme of Yugoslav works and pieces by Marius Constant and Harrison Birtwistle; *The Triumph of Time* came over somewhat diffidently as the festival's grand finale, some late-night jazz aside, and seemed to be more respected than really enjoyed by the local audience.

A few words, finally, about the local music itself. At the 1985 Biennale I actually heard a smaller number of works by Yugoslav composers than I did four years earlier. The range of styles and aesthetics they displayed was, however, wider than it was in 1981; or at least the pieces on offer broadened my own knowledge and experience of what Yugoslav composers are up to these days. Space prevents a comprehensive account of what I heard, both in 1985 and 1987, so I'll once again confine myself to a few examples.

In 1981, I had met a young Serbian composer of minimal music called Miša Savić, but had not been able to hear any of the music of the Belgrade-based group, Opus 4, with which he was associated. Repetitive music of some kind or other appears still to be flourishing in Yugoslavia's capital city, though I have found no evidence of it in Zagreb. I was therefore particularly pleased in 1985 to be able to hear a piece by another member of Opus 4, Vladimir Tošić, born in 1949, who was described in the programme book as 'the only consistent minimalist in Yugoslavia'. His *Hromoserije* (Chromoseries) for four different keyboard instruments concerns itself entirely with the pitch C in various registers and moves fairly predictably but very attractively from a spare and offbeat pointillism to a dense and regular rhythmic chatter, returning finally to the manner of the opening. I was sorry to miss another Tošić première at Zagreb at the 1987 festival, due to my late arrival; and for the same reason I also failed to catch a piece by another Serbian composer working in the same territory, Miloš Raičković, born in 1956. In the latter's case I was, though, lucky, since Raičković – who had only recently returned from a six-year stay in Los Angeles and has since moved to Hawaii – was around for the whole week and played me tapes of several of his compositions, including the one I'd missed; I have also since received a record of his music.[3] Raičković, with disarming candour, describes his works since about 1980 as being in a 'New Classical Style', defined by him as 'a blend of musical Minimalism and the styles of Viennese Classical and early Romantic music (Mozart, Schubert)'. That's actually a pretty accurate description of the pieces I've heard – such as *Dream House* for string trio and piano, premièred at the 1987 festival – which retain many of the characteristics of his models while destroying their directional tonality by reducing the number of pitch classes available to just five or so. The composer feels that this reduction 'gives tonal music a new quality, a new energy', but I'm not sure I can entirely share his view. What he's doing is, though, an undeniably new departure in what many would call the field of New Romanticism.

In many ways the most exciting discovery in new Yugoslav composition which I made in 1985 and was able to follow up in 1987 was the work of Davorin Kempf. Born in 1947, Kempf is the third member of a trio of Croatians often seen by the Yugoslavs themselves as the leading composers of their generation. In my 1981 review I drew attention to the other two – Marko Ruždjak (b.1946) and Frano Parać (b.1948) – since both had works performed in the festival that year. Kempf did not; indeed, I was only vaguely aware of him then, whereas I talked at some length to Ruždjak and more briefly to Parać. In the 1987 Biennale Ruždjak had a piece performed during the opening weekend, which I missed; as with Tošić's new piece, a promised tape never materialised. Parać, who has been Dean of the Croatian Music Institute since 1985, had no piece played at the 1987 festival, but a new double-album retrospective set of records, originally prepared in 1983,[4] finally came out in time to be distributed free-of-charge, causing the reception which was held in Parać's honour to degenerate into a scrum. There is some good music on these records, charting a familiar progression from a more-or-less avant-garde approach to a much more traditional one involving both folk and baroque elements. But nothing I've heard by either of these two other composers has impressed me as much as the two substantial works by Kempf that I have heard in Zagreb.

In 1985 I heard Kempf's *Spectrum* for large orchestra and electronic tape, written in 1984-5 while the composer was a student at Iowa University in the USA. (He seems to have developed a little later than Ruždjak and Parać, which may account for my coming to him last.) The tape part bubbles and glistens most beguilingly, and the orchestra achieves some grandiose climaxes that recall Brahms and Tchaikovsky. Yet somehow the piece as a whole makes glorious, persuasive sense.

In 1987 I had a similar experience with Kempf's first string quartet, entitled *Contrapunctus I*, which he finished in 1986. The Arditti Quartet played the work in a festival programme with which it dazzled the Zagreb audience with its Ferneyhough, Ligeti, Xenakis and so on – as it regularly dazzles contemporary music festival audiences all over the world. The title of this one-movement piece gives adequate warning of its symmetrical structural rigours, 'Fuga stretta', 'Fuga inversa' and all. As before, though, Kempf makes much play with a romantic soundscape: consonant sonorities are lovingly dwelt upon, dramatic crescendos on single chords are indulged, fast fugal writing acquires an exciting and harmonically-directed momentum. In both works he seems to avoid the problems often associated with such an ostensibly derivative approach, although one hearing of each of these pieces was insufficient to work out just how he does it. Kempf is, I feel, one of those rare composers who can genuinely make familiar materials his own. If any Yugoslav composer's music deserves a hearing in Britain right now, then Kempf would, I'm sure, prove a rewarding choice. I hope, at least, that the Ardittis retain *Contrapunctus I* in their repertoire. A recording of some of Kempf's compositions would be an immediate and practical step towards making the largely unknown, woefully under-promoted but far from negligible, contemporary music of Yugoslavia more widely available. Some readers of *Contact* would, I think, be pleasantly surprised.

[1] Keith Potter, '11th Zagreb Music Biennale', *Contact* 23 (Winter 1981), pp.36-40.

[2] Marija Božić and Eva Sedak, eds. *Skladateliske sinteze osamdesetih godina/Compositional Syntheses of the Eighties* (Zagreb: Zagreb Music Biennale/Music Information Centre of the Zagreb Concert Management, 1986). (The festival management's address is Trnjanska b.b., 41000 Zagreb.)

[3] Radio-televizije Beograd RTB 2131013. The two works on this record are *Flying Trio* for piano trio and *Dream Quartet* for piano quartet. (RTB's address is Beograd [Belgrade], Makedonska 21.)

[4] Frano Parać, Suvremeni hrvatski skladatelji/Contemporary Croatian Composers Series, Jugoton LSY 65069-70. The nine works on these records are *Music for Strings and Harpsichord; Sarabande* for symphony orchestra; *Music for Strings; Collegium Vocale* for six singers; String Trio; *Composition for Two Choirs a cappella; Ed è subito sera* for three groups of singers and symphony orchestra; *Oboè sommerso* for mezzo-soprano, oboe and chamber orchestra; and *Thèmes* for piano.

Hilary Bracefield

Gaudeamus Music Week 1987

International Gaudeamus Music Week, Amsterdam, Holland, 11-15 September, 1987

The Gaudeamus Festival exists to bring together young composers from all over the world and to allow them to have music performed. Where and how this is done is continually questioned and changed by the Foundation in an endeavour to serve young composers best. Since I visited the 1982 Festival,[1] the Gaudeamus Foundation has moved its base to Amsterdam from Bilthoven and the monetary first prize has been reinstated, but the event has been curtailed in length and, for the first time, the upper age limit of participant composers reduced from 35 to 30. The reason given for this decision was that too many of the chosen composers in previous years had been over 30, and the Foundation wants 'to give the really young composers a better chance.'

Fifteen younger composers from England to USA, from Sweden to Japan, were given this chance in 1987 and had works for chamber orchestra or smaller combination selected by a jury consisting of Paul-Heinz Dittrich (German Democratic Republic), Michael Finnissy (Great Britain) and Tomas Marco (Spain). The works were sifted into three concerts stretching over a long weekend (Friday evening to Sunday afternoon): the organisers have decided that critics and hangers-on are more likely to attend everything in a short period than if it is spread over a week. The composers remained for a further three days of discussion led by Michael Finnissy and Arne Mellnäs (Sweden), gatherings from which, however, others were not excluded. The Music Week again used the congenial building of the IJsbreker with its adjacent café-bar as its main venue, and sorties were also made to a city-centre church and the VARA Broadcasting Studio at Hilversum. Prizewinners from the 1987 International Competition for Electroacoustic Music, Bourges, were featured in an extra concert (a worthwhile custom begun in the 1982 festival) and to leaven the lump of young hopefuls, music by three composers who had had past Gaudeamus success, Arne Mellnäs, Enrique Raxach and Tona Scherchen, was given in their presence at two further concerts during the weekend. I find the Gaudeamus Music Week a friendly and relaxing event and the organisers, Chris Walraven and Henk Heuvelmans, more than welcoming. Given the closeness of Amsterdam to Great Britain, it is surprising how few young British composers turn up either as selected composers or onlookers: it is not a daunting festival, and the chance to meet other composers from around the world is not to be sneezed at.

Worthy the Gaudeamus enterprise certainly is, but having a trio of disparate selectors find suitable works for a set number of concerts within a particular financial framework and for a finite number of performers and groups seems inevitably to lead to music of mainstream blandness. Certainly the selectors ensured that nothing incompetent was included, but an over-all greyness was undeniable. One result of the telescoping of the concerts and their separation from the composers' discussions is that one loses the chance of hearing tapes and presentations by

participants. In the past this gave a wider perspective of their music than one piece in a concert can ever do, and in 1982 certainly helped me to gain a much more favourable impression of some participants' music. But the 1982 sessions *were* very long; if they were to be reinstated, it would have to be under firm chairmanship.

Richard Toop, in his review of last year's festival, drew attention to the generally poor standard of performance.[2] It is still a problem, though this year it affected concerts by the older composers rather than the younger. The balancing act between finding combinations of instruments needed to perform the chosen pieces and getting enough rehearsal time within a manageable schedule, given exigencies of financing, seems very difficult. Might it therefore be better to present the works of the young composers in workshop performances in which they, the visiting judges and discussion leaders and the performers work together on the pieces? A selection could then be performed in a final concert. But as things stand, if no Dutch group has time to prepare a piece adequately, the organisers really have to consider whether visiting groups should be invited.

The eradication of composers over 30 from the competition probably eliminated some good music, but all the prizewinning pieces in the Bourges competition concert were also by composers within the age limit. That well-made, original and interesting works are being produced by the younger age group was readily to be heard in this enjoyable concert, particularly in two pieces for flute and tape: *Sin ti por el alma adentro* by the London-based Julio d'Escrivan (b.Venezuela, 1960), and *Exchange* by Richard Karpen (b.USA, 1957).

The fifteen Gaudeamus pieces were grouped into light-weight (De IJsbreker), middleweight (Waalse Kerk) and heavyweight (Hilversum) ghettos. Composers' ages ranged from 22 to 30. One trend discernible was a liking for unusual sonorities, ranging from a work for solo piccolo entitled *Furiosamente* by Jay Alan Yim (b.USA, 1958), to one for the unlikely combination of two trombones, two electric guitars and two cellos – *Les Tuchins* by Bent Sørensen (b.Denmark, 1958) – to one for eight double-basses –*Third Quiet Music* by Leonard Payton (b.USA, 1958). On the other hand there were several string quartets and works for other 19th-century chamber combinations, solo string pieces and pieces for typical 20th-century chamber combinations. Only one slight work used vocal resources, *Pietra di Rugiada* for soprano and piano by Fulvio Brambilla (b.Italy, 1958).

No matter for what medium the composer was writing, however, there seemed to be a dislike of any sort of contrast. At one extreme *Trarre* by Ron Ford (b.USA, 1959) for five drummers battered us into submission after pounding for some time at rather simplistic rhythmic patterns; on the other Payton's piece for eight double-basses perversely explored only wispy sounds from his noble band. Sørensen's *Les Tuchins* did more with his sombre colouring, macabre and aggressive by turns, and both the Piano Quartet of Suk Han Lee (b.South Korea, 1965) and the string quintet *Downstream* by James Clarke (b.England, 1957) were aware of possibilities still available from traditional combinations, though Clarke's piece was much more assured.

Perhaps the chamber-orchestra composers got the best deal, with careful attention paid to their works by the Radio Chamber Orchestra conducted by Ernest Bour. *Anamorphose* by Karen Tanaka (b.Japan, 1961) handled the medium in powerful fashion, and *Kast* by Karen Rehnqvist (b.Sweden, 1957), a work for string orchestra, was not ashamed to use both good old-fashioned counterpoint and 'pictorial' music in an intricately worked-out piece of some daring, and one which the orchestra seemed to enjoy. But after the interval we were treated to a work by the Dutch composer David Coppoolse (b.1960) with the ominous title of *Una Storia della mille e una notte*; one story it may have been, but as the orchestra blew and sawed away and the clock's hands slowly moved round the dial, one wondered if we were getting the other thousand. The work 'could be considered neo-romantic (or post-modern)' wrote the composer. Possibly. It was a long time to wait for the ending 'when everything more or less is merged and only a soft, quietly moving layer remains, as a blanket of sizzling air above a hot desert'.

This was followed by a reception at which the prizewinner was announced. I could not quarrel with the decision, which was to award it to Tanaka for her utterly professional orchestral work. Honourable mentions were made of Clarke, Rehnqvist and Yim, with a nod to youth in a mention for Lee. The prize, incidentally, consists of Hfl.4000 (about £1,300) given as a commission for a future Gaudeamus Music Week. Last year's winner, Uros Rojko (b.Yugoslavia, 1954), also a beneficiary of this pleasant idea, responded with *Tongen II*, an unexceptional work for two double-basses and amplification, heard in the opening concert.

A new idea from Gaudeamus is to have previous successful participants present to hear a retrospective of their music. The first three to be thus honoured were Arne Mellnäs, who remained to help lead the young composers' discussions, the Spanish composer Enrique Raxach, long resident in Holland, and Tona Scherchen, the Chinese-German composer, who is back living in France after some time in the USA. The criteria by which works were selected for the two concerts (presumably mainly financial – it was all intimate music) gave, however, a curious and limited view of their progress since their successes. Mellnäs's choral pieces *L'Infinito* (1982) and *Dream* (1970) received depressingly lacklustre performances from the ASKO choir; his most recent work on show, *Stampede* (1985) for saxophone quartet wasn't quite as exciting as its name suggests, but produced some fashionable Doppler effects. It was instructive to hear Raxach's string quartet *Fases* (1961) from the 1962 festival – a piece very much of its time. Others of his works played were all fairly slight essays for one or two instruments, though *Chimaera* (1974) for bass clarinet and tape was not only played by Harry Sparnaay but given with an additional choreographed part for a dancer, to no great benefit to the work. As perhaps the most fascinating composer at the festival, it was a pity that Tona Scherchen was represented by just three tiny works, but all were instructively clear and intense. *Sin* (1965) for flute showed its era, certainly, but *Yi* (1973) for two players at one marimba was a pleasant set of pieces, and *Radar* (1980) for piano was potentially the hit of the festival. It suffered dreadfully from lack of rehearsal, and a marvellous evocation of New York stride-piano style just didn't swing.

It always seems that one ends up castigating festivals in reviews. The Gaudeamus Music Week needs a bit more zing, but it remains an important part of the international contemporary-music scene. It needs our support and more financial help from within its own country. And given its closeness to our shores and its

benefits to young composers, it should receive far more attention from British hopefuls than it seems to do at present.

The Gaudeamus Music Week is organised by Gaudeamus Foundation, Swammerdamstraat 38, 1091 RV Amsterdam, Netherlands.

[1] See my article in *Contact 26* (Spring 1983), pp.38-40.

[2] *Contact 31* (Autumn 1987), pp.39-40

Keith Potter

Musica Nova 1987

Seventh International Festival of Contemporary Music, Glasgow, 13-19 September 1987

Contact has managed to review all Glasgow's seven Musica Nova festivals so far with the exception of the first one, which took place in April 1971. (In 1973 the joint organisers – the University of Glasgow's Music Department and the Scottish National Orchestra – sensibly moved the festival from the spring to the autumn, where it has since stayed; this basically seems a wise decision.) I'm pleased we've done so, since I think these reviews provide a record of an important event in the British new-music calendar of the seventies and eighties. Its history has been charted; the music performed has been examined, in particular the specially commissioned new works by each festival's four Featured Composers; and relevant issues have been discussed. And we've provided a forum for opinions about how such an event should be run and what its value is.[1]

And to whom. It's interesting, looking through those reviews, to see just how often the issue of the audience comes up for discussion. Hilary Bracefield, writing about Musica Nova 1984, pinpoints the recent problems particular to the Glasgow festival. And she was to some extent taking off from the more general issues I had raised shortly before in a rather lengthy piece on the Huddersfield Festival, so I'll try not to go over ground that both of us have already travelled in these pages. But the problems of response, both local and national, to such an event must remain central to any debate about the value and purpose of it. Going up to Glasgow last September reopened the debate for those of us inevitably branded as *parachutistes*, while the local population must clearly have a different perspective. (The next Musica Nova review in these pages should probably be by someone based in Glasgow. Though it's interesting to observe that the two reviews we've had by local residents have been less critical of the festival in general than those by outsiders; and neither made an issue of the 'audience problem'. One inevitably falls to speculating on the reasons for this.)

The most disturbing thing to arise from our report on the last Musica Nova was that it was apparently said in 1984 – and said more than once – that the festival existed 'for the benefit of the Scottish National Orchestra itself: to give the orchestra work to get their teeth into, to make sure that they had a chance to perform contemporary music'. Few would be so foolish as to imagine that the market forces which increasingly govern our orchestras in these Thatcherite times allow them to programme contemporary music as a matter of course. The reason usually given for this is that attendances would fall so much that the financial stability of these orchestras, already perilous, would be threatened to the point of disaster. The argument that the players themselves will not get the experience of performing contemporary scores without the special financial effort involved in putting on a separate festival therefore seems sensible, if regrettable.

The argument that the main – or even a main – purpose of an event such as Musica Nova is to benefit the players is, on the other hand, very worrying. Of course their musical education ought to have prepared them far better than it probably did to be technically well-equipped enough and sufficiently open-minded to play a wide variety of contemporary scores, including those that challenge them intellectually. And of course they need the regular experience of rehearsing and performing such music to keep themselves technically and musically 'fit' and abreast of things. But surely the overriding reason for Musica Nova's existence is to bring a wide range of contemporary music – and particularly works that challenge familiar norms and expectations – to the widest audience possible.

It doesn't matter if some of this audience decides that some, or even all, of the music performed in the festival isn't for them. It doesn't even matter if in the end at least a few of the more rebarbatively difficult kinds of new works are abandoned to the 'new-music ghetto': some music undoubtedly belongs there, and there is little virtue in denying it, as Milton Babbitt pointed out 30 years ago. Indeed, few have done more than he has to encourage the debates about both new music and the audience and new music and the orchestra.[2] Visitors to Musica Nova 1981 had their own chance to decide for themselves whether Babbitt's own music deserves its place in the ghetto when several of his compositions, including two orchestral works, were performed with Babbitt present as Featured Composer. As Stephen Arnold, a lecturer in music at Glasgow University and now one of Musica Nova's three artistic directors, is a leading Babbitt scholar, he is a particularly appropriate person to see that this debate is followed up by the festival itself. But to suggest that any festival should be mounted, especially with public funds, largely for the musical well-being of those who are asked to play in it actually spells out the opinion that any audience for it comes second. That's surely wrong. And it reveals a sad lack of imagination after more than a decade's experience of the problems.

It could, however, be argued that this attitude is simply realist. And, in fact, in focusing attention on the needs of the professionals, Musica Nova is nowadays implementing, whether it realises it or not, the chief recommendation made by Barbara Winrow in her review of the 1976 festival. (As she pointed out, some of the participants that year actually drew up a list of 'positive proposals for the future' and presented them to the festival organisers. I was there myself in 1976 and can remember this being done. One always wonders

exactly what happens to such documents . . .) 'If', she argued, 'in its next incarnation, Musica Nova caters liberally for its future composers – the people, after all, who have scraped together the cost and travelled from all over the country and committed themselves wholly and seriously to the week – then it will have established for itself a strong nucleus with, in fact, an intrinsic long-term interest in promoting the public relations of "new music". If it fails to do this, it risks decaying from within – a common enough fate of new enterprises – and all wider issues will then be irrelevant.'

This, of course, is advocating that more attention be paid to the professional, or would-be professional, composer as opposed to the players of the SNO. To aim at one, though, is not to deny the other attention: they go together very well, since there is always a great need for each side – creators and interpreters – to understand the other better. The idea of making more provision for composers, who have a vested interest in the event's future, seems in any case very sensible. Certainly in all subsequent festivals some effort has been made to attract more student composers, in particular, to Glasgow for this festival-cum-conference. The arrangements for student seminars and workshops, in which the featured composers and students can examine scores and discuss issues, were better in 1979 and 1981 than in 1976, to judge from what I have read and heard. And in 1984 and 1987, the Society for the Promotion of New Music mounted its annual Composers' Forum in conjunction with the festival. The 1987 forum was directed by David Bedford and Nicola LeFanu; I'll say more about it below. Basically this latest move has been beneficial, even though one can describe its effect either altruistically (' . . . Musica Nova's audience enlarged and its value enhanced for the second time by the SPNM forum . . .', as I have put it elsewhere) or more cynically ('The presence of the SPNM delegates disguised the thinness of the rest of the audience . . .', as Bracefield said of 1984).

Just how much has been achieved in those years, though? Winrow's suggestion was, deliberately I think, ambiguous about the nature of the mix between local composers and ones from further afield which should be attempted in order to produce the sort of thriving venture she obviously had in mind. But it's clear that locals, as well as *parachutistes*, are needed to make much impact on the wider local population and persuade it that Musica Nova is an exciting event in the musical calendar that it simply cannot afford to miss. There was, indeed, some effort in 1987 to involve young Scottish composers in particular as well as young composers in general in the Musica Nova Electro-Acoustic Programme. This was an admirable project, allowing a number of composers to spend several weeks in the University Music Department's now quite venerable Electronic Music Studio, directed by Arnold, making pieces to be presented in two lunchtime recitals during the festival week. Participants were students and in the main young, generally less well-known, professionals; several were from Scotland. (James Dillon, one of Musica Nova 1987's Featured Composers and actually born in Glasgow, had also originally been invited; because of pressure of work on his orchestral commission for the festival, he unfortunately didn't manage to take part in the project. Tape pieces by two of the other Featured Composers – Toru Takemitsu and Bernd Alois Zimmermann – were, however, included in the lunchtime recitals.)

The SPNM forum also attracted some local composers, of course. Indeed, I understand that the clientele of this long-established annual event changes noticeably when it 'comes north': the majority of delegates in Glasgow in both 1984 and 1987 were, unsurprisingly I suppose, from Scotland and the north of England. Local professional soloists and ensembles such as the Edinburgh-based New Music Group of Scotland, directed by Edward Harper, as well as amateur forces such as the SNO Chorus, participate regularly in the festival itself. And the Scottish Music Archive makes its presence felt in a number of ways.

The collaboration between Musica Nova and the SPNM would no doubt have pleased Winrow: it has certainly improved the opportunities available for composers during the week (though in the past one could, of course, have gone to the SPNM Composers' Weekend as well as Musica Nova and benefited from each in different ways). I think, though, that she would have probably been somewhat disappointed if, like me, she had returned to Musica Nova after eleven years. There is still, notably, a lack of obvious progress in the SNO's familiarity with, to say nothing of real commitment to, new music, and in the orchestral members' involvement with the festival itself; if Musica Nova really is conceived for the SNO players' benefit, its effectiveness must hence be seriously questioned. The collaboration with the SPNM has brought new problems as well as improvements. And the situation regarding any wider audience for Musica Nova seems dire.

The response of the SNO is, admittedly, rather better than was reportedly the case in 1979, the year when visitors were treated to a splendid opposition between the uncompromising modernism of Brian Ferneyhough and the neo-Romanticism of Robin Holloway, as well as the music of Tona Scherchen-Hsaio and Thomas Wilson. It must have all seemed the same to some of the players, though. Nicholas Bannen reported 'photographs of Holloway and Scherchen-Hsaio retrieved from the SNO centre [sic] dartboard where they had hung impaled like voodoo dolls' and 'expensive orchestral material [that for Ferneyhough's *La terre est un homme*] defaced and in some cases irreparably damaged by players'.

Yet the opportunity, which must be unique in Britain at least, to involve a major symphony orchestra in the major compositional issues of today via interaction with composers – first within the festival and then, following Winrow's admittedly rather optimistic plan, outside it as well – still hasn't fully been seized. I'm in danger, though, of confusing having the debate with winning the argument; and it may of course simply be that 'new music', in most of the senses that *Contact*, say, understands the term, has lost the argument since 1976 to the George Lloyds, not to say the Margaret Thatchers. (The latter is, however, unlikely in Scotland; it's instructive to a southerner to observe how different are the political sensibilities 400 miles north of London.) But it does seem a pity that there is so little evidence of real involvement here. The SNO in fact seemed more tolerant of the new music they were asked to play in 1987 than did their colleagues in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, which now also participates in the festival. It was depressing to witness just how little sympathy the BBC orchestral players showed, notably towards Dillon's admittedly difficult music, which is possibly rather ungrateful to perform: especially depressing since this orchestra has many

more young players in it than does the SNO, and one expects that something of the work done in our music colleges over the last few years to increase players' understanding of contemporary music would have had an effect on the orchestral profession by now.

It is, though, the SNO's festival, at least in part, and it is the SNO which, under the terms on which Musica Nova was originally set up, could really have benefited by now from the interaction of which I am speaking. The problems are by no means simply due to recalcitrance on the part of performers. The main reason why so little has changed is that the extent and, perhaps even more importantly, the possible nature of that interaction have not been fully explored. As things are currently arranged, there is little or no chance for the orchestral musicians and the large number of composers and other interested parties present at Musica Nova to meet and exchange ideas. Bannen's report on the 1979 festival suggests that there were more opportunities to mix with the musicians that year than there are now. The physical as well as organisational separation of SPNM and SNO events must be a reason for this. Another is the simple fact that SPNM delegates have more organised for them, especially if they have a piece being done, than did student composers at Musica Nova under the old scheme; this means that they have less time, and perhaps inclination, to do more than attend the main concerts. It may be unrealistic to expect either that any 'marriage' would last long or that it would give birth to anything very definable. But it ought not to be beyond the wit of the organisers to think up one or two projects involving at least some members of the orchestra as well as the musicians of the small groups present. If the main purpose – or even *a* main purpose – of Musica Nova is indeed to benefit the members of the SNO (I wonder how many of them see it that way), then more interaction must be a priority.

As things stand now, the SPNM forum actually acts as a barrier across this line of communication. It can also easily mean that those heavily involved with the SPNM activities have little chance of much encounter with Musica Nova's Featured Composers, though at least one SPNM delegate in 1987 spoke enthusiastically of the opportunities offered simply to be around such famous names as Elliott Carter and had clearly benefited from this in 1984. Of course it's up to the festival and to the Featured Composers themselves, as well as the SPNM organisers and individual delegates, to keep the channels of communication open. The spread of activities physically doesn't, though, help matters. (There was a rumour that the new Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama building – which I saw in the throes of near-completion and part-habitation on my visit to Glasgow: it looks very impressive, by the way – might become the base for a lot of both the SPNM and Musica Nova activities next time; this would at least go some way towards solving the practical problems.)

And the more the composers whose pieces have been selected for rehearsal, recording and possible concert performance by the SPNM-invited ensembles (here the excellent and experienced group Gemini, conducted by Graham Treacher) regard the occasion as simply an opportunity to get a professional performance to take away for the enhancement of their careers, the less the educational function of both the forum and the festival will mean much. I sympathised with those composers who were reportedly the victims of one or two insensitively lengthy attempts at instruction in such matters as notation at the expense of getting on with the hearing, and indeed recording, of as much of their pieces as time permitted. And there will always be practical obstacles, too: in 1987 a surprisingly short shortlist of works for the final concert was at the last minute rendered virtually irrelevant by the unfortunate indisposition of the soprano, Mary Wiegold, who had been given the lion's share of the work. But perhaps some of the composers underestimate the educational side of the forum's work, and overestimate the extent to which the SPNM either can or should simply function to boost their egos and enhance their careers.

With due acknowledgement to all this, the whole thing is still not pulling together sufficiently to make much difference to relationships within the musical profession, let alone use whatever new understanding can be reached between composers and performers as a catalyst to involve the wider musical community, as Winrow was proposing. A good illustration of this absence of the feeling that things are pulling in the same direction can also serve as a sad reflection on the level of local commitment to the festival. The SNO Chorus participated in an admittedly bizarre programme juxtaposing Takemitsu, Dillon and Edward McGuire (the latter one of the few Scottish composers to have an established reputation south of the border and himself an excellent example of interaction between contemporary music and the wider community, for example in his involvement with the folk group Whistlebinkies). The choir tackled McGuire's *Pipes of Peace* for chorus and piper – an effective piece of 'modern music without tears' – with well-prepared gusto. But the Takemitsu part of the programme was reduced (due to lack of rehearsal time, we were told), and those pieces that were sung seemed to me poorly prepared and entirely lacking the involved feeling of a proper performance. This would have been understandable, if inexcusable, had the music been as difficult and unfamiliar to the singers as, say, Dillon's music obviously was to the BBC SSO. (There is, perhaps fortunately, no Dillon work for large chorus.) But Takemitsu's present harmonic language is very straightforward and familiar – too much so, I'd say, but more of that below – and there was no excuse for not doing his works justice. Is there no way that the SNO Chorus can be made to feel more involved in Musica Nova too?

Eleven years on, then, all too much seems the same to the outside observer. I was amazed once again, like a typical sassenach, at the quantity and quality of music-making that seems to be going on in Glasgow – and Edinburgh too, I'd better add hastily: professional work of a high standard that isn't as much known about in London as perhaps it should be. But new music leads as ghetto-ised an existence in Scotland as it does in so many other places, and Musica Nova seems to emphasise this rather than to be doing much to change things. Perhaps I'm wrong and new music has a lot more going for it during the main season. (There was also a Xenakis festival in Glasgow last spring, of which I heard some good reports.) But the festival's inability to fill even the small SNO Centre for the main orchestral programmes did not suggest this is very likely. The Centre, attractive though it is, actually serves as the orchestra's rehearsal hall and isn't meant for concerts at all. The decision to use it may be severely practical: not only because audiences are expected to be small, but because Glasgow's main concert hall is, I was told, far from ideal. But it also

indicates a lack of nerve, of ambition; of belief, dare one say, in the whole venture. It's hard now to believe that 'In May 1961 . . . there was a packed house in Glasgow for the British premières of Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, Gunther Schuller's *Spectra*, and Thea Musgrave's *Obliques*.'[3] But times change, and new music simply isn't as fashionable as it seems it was in Britain during that brief period in the early sixties. And yet to say that is to risk being as defeatist as I've already accused the organisers of Musica Nova of being.

* * *

There was, despite these strictures, some good music to be heard in Musica Nova 1987, as well as opportunities for the usual range of informal encounters for which one always values such an occasion. Of the four Featured Composers this year, one was rather removed from the usual business involved in 'featuring': Bernd Alois Zimmermann is, I think, the first Featured Composer at Musica Nova to be no longer living.

Zimmermann, who committed suicide in 1970 at the age of 52, fell a little awkwardly between the generation of German composers such as Wolfgang Fortner, whose anti-Nazi pedigrees and 'elder statesman' roles permitted their music to survive to some extent the accusations of being old-fashioned, and that of younger avant-gardists, notably Stockhausen, who seems to have viewed Zimmermann as a deadly rival during the fifties and sixties. His compositions do not entirely avoid the problems of this 'in-betweenness', and they range widely and even wildly in both style and quality. Zimmermann has always had a few fervent champions, and two of them – the cellist Siegfried Palm, for whom all the composer's works involving solo cello were written, and the SNO's Principal Guest Conductor and festival artistic director Matthias Bamert – were on hand to make up for this Featured Composer's absence by talking informatively and candidly about him and his output as well as by playing an important part in the performance of an intelligently devised selection of his works. I don't think my view of Zimmermann was much altered as a result of hearing or rehearing eight of the nine works played during the week. But it was valuable to be able to listen to such good performances of the Cello Concerto (Palm and the SNO under Bamert) and the crazy collage that calls itself *Musique pour les soupers du roi Ubu* (SNO under Richard Bernas, standing in for Oliver Knussen; the latter's presence was stamped all over the programme of Knussen, Turnage and Takemitsu in which the Zimmermann piece appeared). And of the three solo string sonatas – for violin (Sophie Langdon), viola (James Durrant) and cello (Palm again) – which chart the composer's move in the decade before 1960 from the somewhat neo-classical to what the anonymous programme note called the 'transcendental and revolutionary'. Bamert – who is, by the way, for anyone who doesn't yet know it, a very fine conductor and a tremendous asset to Musica Nova – is rumoured to be anxious to do Zimmermann's *magnus opus*, the opera *Die Soldaten*, with Scottish Opera; this rumour should be widely encouraged. (But who in Glasgow is going to go to it?)[4]

Toru Takemitsu is very much alive and well; he is, indeed, on the crest of a wave of popularity just now. But he participated in the business of the festival hardly at all; an odd little impromptu speech – literally inscrutable because largely inaudible – that he made during the already-mentioned choral concert almost made one wish he had allowed his music to speak entirely for itself, reflected only against the image of the detached oriental figure listeners could observe hovering over the festival as opposed to actually among us. Takemitsu also had his eloquent apologist, however, in the larger-than-life and less than inscrutable form of Knussen, who conducted a public interview with the composer – or, rather, gave a lecture to which Takemitsu appended a few comments – even though he was unable to conduct his scheduled concert. Knussen talked persuasively about what he called the 'Messiaen problem' with Takemitsu's music: the fact that harmonic and colouristic similarities between the work of these two composers tend to deafen listeners, critics particularly perhaps, to the rhythmic and conceptual differences. I've been guilty of this to some extent myself in the past, and I did honestly try to atone for it by attempting to listen to Takemitsu's compositions in the festival with an unbiased ear.

It's certainly possible to hear the pieces in the *Rain* series, for example – *Rain Spell* was played by the New Music Group of Scotland one lunchtime – in the kind of 'Japanese garden' way of which the composer speaks; this is clearly some distance from Messiaen's more rhetorical approach, even if Takemitsu says that these works move towards the 'sea of tonality'. *A Way A Lone II* for string orchestra – played by the BBC SSO under Jerzy Maksymiuk – meets a more functional tonality at least half way, so that even if its concept and rhythmic language are still unMessiaenic, I for one find it disappointing that the music never actually gives what it tonally seems to promise. That isn't a problem with other recent works such as the choral pieces called *Uta*, different songs from which were sung both by Singcircle, in an ill-conceived and lightweight programme that opened the festival, and by the SNO Chorus as already mentioned. 'I don't afraid to use tonal now', said Takemitsu in his endearingly fractured English during the Knussen interview. He's not joking; what's more, these songs are based on tunes written when the composer was eighteen. We are on dangerous ground here, where what I'd call, for want of a better term, true post-modernism has been determinedly and disastrously replaced by pastiche. In these choral pieces and at least some other recent works Takemitsu is, it seems to me, simply rewriting the music of the past rather than creating something new with old materials. It's for that reason that I don't feel wrong to describe *To the Edge of Dream* for guitar and orchestra (played by Manuel Barrueco and the SNO under Bamert) as 'Rodrigo meets Berg', since I couldn't hear the piece on its own terms: it didn't seem to have any 'own terms'. The two brief fanfares commissioned for the festival and premièred in the same programme are pretty nondescript, and not what Musica Nova commissions should be about.

In the absence of major foreign composers able to 'feature' themselves as well as their music (which is an important aspect of the festival and should not be so lacking again), the usual pair of British figures achieved more prominence than usual. Though ten years apart in age, James Dillon and Mark-Anthony Turnage are at more similar stages of their careers and even musical developments than this might imply. Dillon is a late developer and writes the sort of music that takes a long time both to conceive and to compose out. Turnage, while hardly prolific or indeed unserious about what he does, is fairly precocious and

writes the sort of music that can, in theory, be produced much faster, since it owes a good deal to familiar kinds of material and familiar ways of doing things. Both composers come from working-class backgrounds fundamentally unsympathetic to the kind of culture of which they are now officially part. (Dillon was on home ground in Glasgow, while Turnage was born in Grays, in Essex.) Both have been deeply involved with popular music in the past. Neither is firmly committed to 'establishment' views, however, despite their engagement with the elitist organisations which promote establishment modernism. And though Turnage talks more freely about his background than Dillon, both give the impression of wanting to achieve something in their work that will break right out of the established forms and attitudes of 'serious music', and even break through class distinctions, without being entirely sure how to achieve it. Both have emerged into public view during the 1980s; Dillon is now 37, Turnage 27. Both talked informatively in interview about themselves and their music: Dillon to Roger Wright, Turnage to Robert Maycock.

I was glad of the chance to get some sort of overview of Turnage, since I've heard his music only sporadically over the last few years and have been unsure how to place him. I'm still not sure now, except that I feel he might just be on the verge of something really interesting; whether it's what I alluded to above, I'm again not sure. He professed unease about being a part of the 'new-music scene'; he is currently one of its most fêted younger figures. He gives his pieces titles like *Beating about the Bush* and *Three Screaming Popes* (the latter is for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and due in 1989; it alludes to the triptychs of Francis Bacon – 'by far my favourite painter'), and interprets his own work as a violent cleansing process to purge his angry reaction to his upbringing.

Yet compositions such as *And Still a Softer Morning* for small ensemble seem to be typically and tamely *'stilo SPNMo'*, to borrow an epithet from one of my new co-editors; and even in *Night Dances* for chamber orchestra – which, like much of Turnage's music, evokes popular sources directly, in this case the samba and Miles Davis – the raw energy implicit in his material is smothered with too much 'good mannerism', too much 'establishment surface'. *And Still a Softer Morning* was played by members of the New Music Group of Scotland, *Night Dances* by the SNO under Bernas. We also heard *Lament for a Hanging Man* for soprano and ensemble in Gemini's evening festival programme, but the intended impact of this must have been seriously affected by the absence of the prescribed lighting effects.

Gross Intrusion, Turnage's festival commission, was played by the SNO under Bamert on the last night. The work's title, another typical Turnage mixture of the musically descriptive and the scatalogical, comes from a short story by Steven Berkoff; the composer is currently writing an opera on Berkoff's play *Greek*. As the basis for a twelve-minute piece in which lyrical music for strings, some of it drawn from a love duet in the opera, is disrupted four times by violent outbursts of woodwind and brass, the idea is as strong as the title is apt. The division of the string section into seven small groups, one of them amplified, leads to some expertly controlled filigree textures which keep the lyricism from stagnating. Overall, though, I found the work disappointing: the emphasis on line exposes the weakness of Turnage's basic material, and the intrusions lack the power to overwhelm as they should. It seemed unnaturally compacted, somehow: perhaps the composer is simply generating material more appropriate to large-scale forms, which bodes well for the opera itself, scheduled for June in Munich, if Turnage can come up with some really strong melodic material.

Of James Dillon there is plenty elsewhere in this issue. So let me confine myself to brief praise for his festival commission, *helle Nacht*, which was also premièred by the SNO under Bamert, this time in its concert at the week's beginning. The title, which in the programme note was translated as 'a lit and lighting darkness', comes from Holderlin's translation of Sophocles and refers to Antigone's burial alive; the relevant image appears to be that of darkness as somehow intensely bright. And this time the piece really does have the seering, seething and violent effect that its title leads a listener to expect. *helle Nacht* (the lower-case 'h' is correct, if irritating) is the second work in a trilogy that began with *Überschreiten*, Dillon's London Sinfonietta commission from 1986; the word, this time from Rilke, translates as 'crossing over' or perhaps even 'transgression'); it will continue with *Blitzschlag* for flute and orchestra (the title here is taken from Jacobus Boehme, whose writings lie behind the whole cycle; it means 'Lightning bolt'). All Dillon's recent music – and this triptych seems in the process of becoming a splendid summation of it – deals with ideas about harmony and timbre derived to some extent from the work of the French composers of the L'itineraire group (Gerard Grisey, Tristan Murail and others). This deep involvement with developing new formal as well as timbral ideas from the basic acoustical properties of the harmonic series has had an enormously beneficial effect on Dillon's work, focusing it and charging it with a new power and directness. The familiar problems are still there: I don't pretend to have followed more than a small part of what is probably going on in one hearing of a substantial, half-hour piece, and I'm really not sure how accurate the performance was. But I feel justified in referring to the work's directness, because it did make an immediate impact on me: not just of sheer volume (though there was that too), but of purposefully directed emotional energy. At the end of the performance of *helle Nacht*, it didn't seem impossible to believe that Dillon's music might yet mean something to more of his fellow Glaswegians.

* * *

So what is to be done about Musica Nova? Arnold, Bamert and Stephen Carpenter (or rather the latter's successor at the SNO, since I've recently learned that he has left) could, of course, somehow find the money and commission, say, Philip Glass, or even George Lloyd (who could be just as expensive these days), hire the biggest hall in town and await the full houses. But I doubt this is the answer; it isn't mine, despite my enthusiasm for Glass, and I'm pretty certain it isn't theirs. Not only would it be difficult for them to raise the necesary cash; it wouldn't solve the long-term problems, which need interaction and the careful nurturing of an eager, but also committed and trusting, audience, not a large, trendy crowd which three years later has moved on to something else. Unless, of course, Musica Nova can predict that 'something else' and carry on cashing in on the latest fashion; but I doubt both its willingness and its capability here.

No: the only solution seems to be to press on, perhaps at least considering the sorts of ideas I've raised in this review. In addition, Musica Nova should make sure that it benefits from increased funding in 1990, assuming that the festival keeps to the present triennial arrangement. For in that year Glasgow will be European City of Culture. The logic and purpose of this designation at present escape me. Apart, that is, from the obvious chance it should give everyone to get decent funding for arts projects in the city. Musica Nova 1990 could be bigger and better than ever before and should therefore raise its sights. Organisers, please note!

[1] See the following: John Kelsall on the 1973 festival, *Contact 7* (Winter 1973-4), pp. 38-41; Barbara Winrow on 1976, *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-7), pp. 40-41; Nicholas Bannen on 1979, *Contact 21* (Autumn 1980), pp. 28-30; the late Bryan Anderson on 1981, *Contact 24* (Spring 1982), pp. 30-31; and Hilary Bracefield on 1984, *Contact 29* (Spring 1985), pp. 47-50.

[2] See, notably, his articles 'Who cares if you listen?', originally published in *High Fidelity*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (February 1958), pp. 38-40 and 126-7, and reprinted in *The American Composer Speaks*, ed. Gilbert Chase (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 234 ff. and in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 243-50; and 'On *Relata I*', in *The Orchestral Composer's Point of View*, ed. R.S. Hines (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 12-38, reprinted in *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. IX, no.1 (Fall–Winter 1970), pp. 1-22.

[3] Andrew Porter, 'Some New British Composers', in *Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Paul Henry Lang and Nathan Broder (New York: Schirmer/Norton, 1965), p.15. (This book reprints essays written for the fiftieth anniversary issue of *The Musical Quarterly* [January].)

[4] The review was at proof stage when I learned of Bamert's resignation as a director of Musica Nova. This follows the sacking of the SNO's general administrator Stephen Carpenter and Neeme Järvi's resignation as the orchestra's musical director; Bryden Thomson is taking over from Järvi and will probaby play an important part in the 1990 festival, but Carpenter had not, at the time of writing, been replaced. Bamert is reported to have been dismayed at the implications of the SNO's current managerial crisis and far from confident that plans for the next festival could be realised. The plans included visits from both Boulez and Stockhausen, who seem unlikely to come without assurances from Bamert, who is highly respected in continental European new-music circles. Glasgow's Musica Nova 1990 seems in peril, European City of Culture or not.

Christopher Fox

A Berlin Diary

1987 was Berlin's 750th birthday, an anniversary that provoked a spectacular year-long programme of cultural activity. I was there for the latter part of the festivities as a guest of the DAAD Berliner Kunstler-programm (German Academic Exchange Berlin Artists' Programme) which asked only that I 'contribute to the cultural life of the city'. Of that contribution just my concert-going is recorded here: *Contact* has no room for an account of the splendours of the city's cake-shops, of my son's experience of its pre-school educational provision, or of the disturbingly abundant evidence of canine incontinence on its streets. Nor can I present a complete picture of the city's new-music scene: I didn't go to any concerts in the East, not because there weren't any (the GDR's celebration of 750 years of its *administrative* capital were as lavish as the West's), but because crossing the Wall is still sufficiently irksome for my visits to be restricted to a few day-time tourist trips. So what follows is a reflection of the way my curiosity led me to explore an unfamiliar cultural-landscape rather than a representative record of that landscape.

29 September

My first excursion into Berlin's concert life takes me to Kreuzberg, one of the city's more radical districts (its inhabitants were labelled 'anti-Berliners' by the city fathers after riots in the area earlier in the year), to see Rhys Chatham and his massed electric guitarists play in an old *Palais de Danse*. Chatham (b.1952) I know only as a reputation – a proponent of something described as 'art-rock' and a leading light in the New York downtown music scene for the past two decades – and so I seize the chance to add him to my collection of Living Legends of Experimentalism. The reality is rather less impressive than the reputation: the music is brutally over-amplified (my ears ring for the next 36 hours), but not beyond the point where it is possible to tell that Chatham has had only one idea and is sticking to it. His group – six electric guitarists, electric bass and rock drummer – play works covering the last ten years, all using open-tuned guitars and lots of harmonics, articulated in rock-orientated rhythms. The influence of punk rock is unmistakable, but whereas punk at its best coupled acoustic savagery with humour and a certain rough sensuality, Chatham's music is arid and charmless.

1 October

German opera-houses are funded with a generosity appropriate to a country that takes the arts seriously, and they commission new work with an enviable regularity. Tonight it is Berlin's turn, the Deutsche Oper making up for rather a long spell without a new operatic work (although only six years without a commissioned première, Covent Garden!) with the first performance of *Oedipus* by Wolfgang Rihm (b.1952). This is a *big* event, with broadcasts on radio and television, and Rihm's music-theatre (his designation for yet another opera that dare not speak its name) struggles to meet the demands of the occasion.

Rihm has assembled his own libretto from Hölderlin's translation of the Sophocles play and Oedipus-related texts by Nietzsche and Heiner Müller but, apart from a visit to a Freudian psycho-analyst's couch for Oedipus in the latter stages of the work, he stays close to the familiar outline of the story.

As usual with Rihm, the orchestral writing is brilliantly imagined, full of vivid and frequently violent gestures over which the solo voices and an all-male chorus make heroic attempts to project, but its near-constant, neo-Modernist battering of the listener's senses lacks the variety of pace that would give *Oedipus* real momentum. Consequently, one feels none of the awful inexorability of Oedipus' tragedy that makes Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* such a gripping and moving experience, and Rihm's final scene, with the blinded Oedipus tapping his way into the distance and into exile, came rather more as relief than as nemesis.

15 October

To the Literatur Haus to hear simultaneous performances of Cage's *45' for a speaker* (1954) and *34' 46.776" for a pianist* (1954). The Literatur Haus is usually a venue for literary events – readings, seminars, lectures and the like – and is perfectly suited to Cage's lecture/recital hybrid. The text is spoken (in Ernst Jandl's German translation) by Eberhard Blum; the piano is played by Marianne Schroeder. Both perform totally idiomatically: that is, they do exactly what Cage requires, making no attempt to project anything of themselves except their commitment to the work. The rsult is a highly entertaining three-quarters of an hour in which my attention switches, quite arbitrarily it seems, between the text's careful exposition of Cage's aesthetic and the delightfully haphazard juxtaposition of different speeds of vocal delivery and a marvellously rich gamut of piano sounds. I'm reminded of Herbert Henck's authoritative performances of Cage's *Music of Changes*[1] and the thought occurs that perhaps there is something in the German temperament that is particularly suited to the interpretation of Cage – a seriousness and a respect for authentic performance, perhaps; at any rate something quite different from the English tendency to treat Cage's work as an opportunity for winsome sloppiness.

17 October

At first sight it seems that Berlin's 750th birthday present from Stockhausen is a new instalment of *LICHT*: certainly, the posters are proclaiming that *Luzifers Tanz* for piccolo flute, piccolo trumpet, euphonium and orchestra is going to be given its world première by the Radio Symphony Orchestra under the composer's direction. In fact, this is the same *Luzifers Tanz* for symphonic wind-band (1983), commissioned and first performed by the University of Michigan Symphony Band, that then formed the third scene of *SAMSTAG aus LICHT* in that opera's 1984 Milan première (with the Michigan players on tape!). Stockhausen's response to his Berliner Festspiele commission turns out to be no more than a re-arrangement of the piece, adding strings and reducing the wind forces to four representatives from each family (except the trumpets, of which there are six).

The solo parts are taken by regular members of the *LICHT* circus – Markus Stockhausen (trumpet), Kathinka Pasveer (piccolo) and Michael Svoboda (euphonium) – and are, of course, superbly played. The ability of Stockhausen *fils* to switch between air-noises and perfectly tuned and articulated high notes is awe-inspiring; equally remarkable is Ms Pasveer's seamless linking of a harmonic instrumental glissando with a vocalised glissando. Both have extended solos, the trumpet without, the flute with orchestral accompaniment. Michael Svoboda has a less interesting role, playing music that in the opera is given to the bass singing the part of Lucifer. He seems to be intended as a sort of master of ceremonies, although his personality is really closer to the bar-fly/pub-bore character (also a bass) in the later (1972) version of *Momente*.

The piece is well received but I find it turgid in the extreme. *LICHT* seems to require that Stockhausen spend twenty years of his life writing all the sorts of music he does least well. Development in his earlier work has always been most successfully achieved through timbral change or juxtaposition, in *LICHT* development is carried forward primarily through melodic counterpoint; Stockhausen's handling of periodic rhythms has always been rather awkward, and the melodies of *LICHT* are ploddingly regular; Stockhausen's 'theatre' has been most effective as a simple scenic manifestation of compositional processes, yet *LICHT* requires him to extend his pantomimic sense of theatre over more than 24 hours of stage action. The new ground that *Mantra* seemed to have broken is now looking very tired and infertile and I resolve to avoid *LICHT* in future, whether in weekly, daily or bleeding chunk form.

29 October

To the Deutsch Oper to see *Metamorphosen des Ovids* (1987) – subtitled, *Die Bewegung von den Rändern zur Mitte hin und umgekehrt* (The movement from the edges to the centre and back again) – a theatre-piece conceived for the Burg Theater of Vienna by Achim Freyer, with music by Dieter Schnebel (b.1930). Freyer is a German stage-designer/director out of the same mould as Robert Wilson, Philip Glass's first stage collaborator. (Freyer collaborated with Glass on his second opera, *Satyagraha*). As with Wilson, Freyer's primary concern in the theatre is with the stage as a vehicle for visual rather than dramatic images, and these *Metamorphosen* are a series of stage-pictures that, at snail's pace, transform one into another. At the same time a series of figures slowly crosses the stage – an aged jogger, a Viennese tart, a flock of businessmen whose briefcases magically open and close once on each stage-crossing. Once, about two-thirds of the way through, everything stops for an Italianate aria for soprano, Schnebel's most substantial contribution to the *Metamorphosen*. Otherwise he has been responsible for a few nebulous fragments of string music and a female vocal chorus and the most memorable music-event of the evening is the regular playing of *Putting on the Ritz*.

The whole show lasts two-and-a-half hours, without an interval, and is *slow*. The material itself isn't boring – many of the images are very beautiful, rich in pictorial reminiscences (de Chirico, Caspar David Friedrich, Matisse and Dali amongst a cast of thousands) and these stage-pictures are performed with great discipline both by the visible participants, the actors and singers, and their invisible assistants, the stage-hands – but the pacing of the evening is leaden. Freyer has been the prime mover in this project and has simply taken a normal dramatic structure – character exposition, character development, nemesis, apotheosis – stretched it and drained it of drama,

ignoring the example of Robert Wilson who has regularly demonstrated that minimalist, imagist theatre (like his four-and-a-half-hour long *Death, Destruction and Detroit II*, running at the Schaubuhne in Berlin at about the same time) *can* sustain interest over a long period of time, but only if it is structurally imaginative.

Yet for all their failings, these *Metamorphosen* provide much material for reflection. Freyer's visual imaginings are always interesting – his ability to achieve the most delicate transformations of light within his stage-pictures is especially pleasing – and, as always during such snail-like experiences, there is ample time for personal assessment. Is 1988 the year for a week or two of (Ovid-like) Mediterranean exile?

1 November

John King is an American composer/performer working in much the same territory as Laurie Anderson, creating lengthy, but episodic, pieces for solo performer – the pieces sustained by more or less direct allegiance to some central preoccupation, the performer sustained by a battery of electro-acoustic and visual aids. King has come to Berlin to play what ought to be the perfect Berliner show, a piece for slides, voice, guitar, violin and live electronics freely adapted from Brecht's *Das Verhör des Lukullus*[2] (The Trial of Lucullus). In fact his *Condemnation music* is far from perfect; King shifts between two sorts of writing – repetitive improvisations on either electric guitar or electric violin (mostly guitar) which rely heavily on short riffs stored on delay loops on the one hand, and quasi-folk songs on the other. Maybe King is having a bad night, but he just doesn't seem to play in time, the sound is crude and the music is still cruder. Nor do the slides (pictures of assorted military figures from both antiquity and the present, including everyone from Lucullus to Oliver North, and photographs documenting various 20th-century disasters), or King's spoken interjections add anything to the project. There seems to be a fundamental misconception here that if a musician is sufficiently committed to a cause, that commitment will, of itself, ensure success. This is compounded by King's decision to express that commitment through forms derived from rock music, since his attitude to rock music seems to be the classic, patronising approach of the avant garde, that since this music is apparently quite simple, it must be easy to do. Should John King ever buy a Bill Bragg record he might discover that this apparent simplicity is actually the product of considerable artifice.

2 November

Miles Davis passes through on his current tour, bringing his superb young group and playing a two-hour set predominantly based on his most recent album *Tutu*.[3] The venue is one of a number of halls in the massive modern International Conference Centre, a sixties science-fiction film-set come to life. I am a relatively recent convert to Davis' work, but if I had any doubts, this concert dispels them all. Above all else Davis is the most marvellous leader of musicians: his band (saxophone, electric guitar, two keyboardists, bass guitar, drums and percussion) work very hard for him, particularly the sax-player, who carries the main melodic impetus in most of the quicker numbers, and in the ballads their magically sensitive ensemble-playing wraps itself around the silvery Davis sound. Davis spends a lot of the concert bent double, with his back to the audience, playing to the floor, and yet still manages to dominate proceedings completely. As much as I fight it, I can't resist the temptation to compare Davis, at 61, with his near-contemporaries in so-called serious music – the crucial difference seems to be that Davis hasn't just got older; he's matured as well. But with ticket prices like tonight's, perhaps he can afford to mature.

16 November

Lichtknall (1987) by Erhard Grosskopf (b.1934) is virtually the last major event of Berlin's 750th birthday party. It's a commission for the Deutsche Oper, combining dance (choreography by Lucinda Childs) and stage-design (Achim Freyer again) with Grosskopf's music. *Lichtknall* is billed as a 'ballett', and the first night audience contains quite a few nonplussed balletomanes who complain vociferously at the absence of 'proper' dancing (although Lucinda Child's choreography is actually very 'classical' in its preoccupations with cleanly articulated step-patterns and purity of line). There's also a fair amount of muttering to the effect that this 'apocalyptic odyssey', as its creators describe it, is neither a journey nor particularly apocalyptic. Certainly the three parts of the evening, individually entitled *Harmonien* (Harmonies), *Lichtknall* ('Lightbang') and *Erinnerungen* (Memories) are more like separate reflections on things eschatological than a single vision of the end of the world.

Grosskopf has initiated the project, developing the subject-matter and writing most of the music before inviting Freyer and Childs' collaboration, so the overall dramatic shape of the evening is his creation. While musically satisfactory – the work consists of three scenes of, respectively, 35, 10 and 45 minutes, with the interval before the last scene – this structure presents problems for the less open-minded members of the audience, since the most exciting moment of the stage-action occurs in the central scene. As the work starts, we are confronted with a stage bathed in soft white light. On it nine bloated figures are moving, their movements awkward, restricted and repetitive; some have extra legs, some extra heads, all are deformed in some way; from the pit we hear music for two pianos. After 35 minutes, the pianos stop, and the second scene starts; the figures on stage freeze and a high electronic cluster begins in the tape part. Slowly it descends and widens while two percussionists, a clarinettist and the two pianists play overlapping layers of repeated pitches which gradually shift into evermore consonant combinations. Meanwhile the nine figures slowly float off the stage, as do the ultra-violet strip-lights which in *Harmonien* had delineated the front and centre of the performing area, while banks of lights are lowered from above the stage to shine out into the audience. The scene ends with a resolution of the musical processes begun ten minutes earlier – the instrumental music comes into rhythmic and metric unison, tape and live instruments are all harmonically focussed on a low G; the auditorium is flooded with light. After the deliberately understated musical and theatrical action of the first scene, the effect of this 'lichtknall' – simple as it may sound in my description – is quite extraordinarily powerful, the whole scene flowing quite inevitably to its conclusion and creating one of those inexplicable and indelible memories that are the special preserve of music-theatre.

The third scene *Erinnerungen* makes no attempt to explain or develop this image – instead, the stage is clear and the dancers dance. Grosskopf's music for this scene is deceptively uneventful: it appears to undergo little change in density of texture, with the five instrumentalists heard in the previous scene playing most of the time, but it is obvioiusly changing somehow, somewhere, since it is never repetitive. Rather than trying to unravel the mysteries of this fascinating music any further, I resolve to return to it at greater length in a future issue of *Contact*. It's perhaps enough to say here that *Erinnerungen* works, as much as a space for reflection on the calamitous events of 'Lichtknall' as for its own sake, and that *Lichtknall* as a whole is a marvellously brave and profound work (but one whose virtues make little impact on its first audience!)

19 November

To promote both a programme featuring my music in the 'Insel Musik' (Island Music) concert-series and a concert I am to give with the soprano Amanda Crawley in the British Centre, I appear on 'Die Audionauten', a late-night hour of new music on Radio 100, one of Berlin's two new independent-radio stations created in the last couple of years in the wake of changes in the German broadcasting regulations. Radio 100 is funded by various leftish political groups and one or two individuals ('Die Audionauten' must be one of the few new-music programmes that's *owned* by its producer/presenter) and, to be brutally honest, it's hard to see how it can survive. Indeed, within a week of my appearance, rumours (entirely unconnected) circulate that it's about to close. In the meantime 'Die Audionauten' provides a refreshing contrast to the donnish approach favoured by 'Music in Our Time': talk is kept to a minimum and a much wider range of music is played, from 'audio art', through the eccentric wing of electro-pop, to jazz, to avant-garde classical music (I share my hour with tapes of music by the British saxophonist Lol Coxhill, the Soviet composer Sofia Gubaidulina and a Berlin jazz-funk group).

20 November

From the fringe of broadcasting to the establishment: although the 'Insel Musik' concerts are organised independently under the direction of Erhard Grosskopf, they take place in the Small Concert Hall of Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), Berlin's main radio and television station, and SFB record the concerts for subsequent broadcast. The first of the three concerts in the series is devoted to music by a former DAAD guest, the Japanese composer and conductor Maki Ishii (b.1936). We hear four pieces: *Hiten-Seido II* (1983) for two marimbas, *Tango-Prism* (1987) for accordion; *Hiten-Seido III* (1987) for solo marimba and *Ro-ro no Hibiki* (1987) for three percussionists, accordion and tape. Of these, it is *Tango-Prism* that I enjoy least, in part because I am yet to be convinced that the accordion is suited to late-Modernist solo instrumental writing, in part because Ishii's attempts to extract new meanings from the tango rhythm seem to dilute the vitality of that rhythm beyond the point where it retains any interest. *Ro-ro no Hibiki* is the longest piece and also has the most exotic instrumentation, featuring 'stone' instruments made out of ancient volcanic rock which are, as far as I can discover, unique to this piece. Three different 'stone' instruments are used: a very pure-toned set of tubular bells and an equally clear-sounding xylophone, and a set of rough hewn 'stones' into which slits have been cut so that a series of different inharmonic sounds can be produced by striking or stroking them in different places.

In this, as in the other pieces, Ishii manages transitions from one sonority to another very skilfully; indeed, it is his exploration of particular instrumental sonorities that I find most attractive. The marimba duo, for example, has a wonderful central section based around a tremolo on the C sharp below middle C, the players using a succession of mallets of varying hardness to achieve gradual changes in the resultant overtone spectrum. The performances are generally excellent and the two marimba players, Mutsuko Fujii and Nachiko Maekane, quite brilliant.

Nachiko Maekane returns the following evening to give the European première of my *Dead Fingers Talk* for solo percussionist. This is a superb performance, although the critic of the *Tagespiegel*, Berlin's quality daily paper, said of the music that 'orginell ist das nicht.' (Who said anything about trying to be original?)

22 November

The final night of 'Insel Musik' is a concert by Trio Basso Koln. They play a programme of three solo pieces – one each for viola (*Bratschgeschloif* (1977) by Hans-Joachim Hespos, b.1938), cello (*AA-GA* (1984) by the Korean Younghi Pagh-Paan) and double-bass (*Theraps* (1976) by Xenakis) – and three trios, by Nikolaus A. Huber (b.1939), Grosskopf and Friedrich Goldmann. Concerts of new (or newish) pieces by prolific commissioners, like the Trio Basso or the Ardittis, are always interesting, if not always for the quality of the music played, then for the snapshot they give of *à la mode* writing for that particular ensemble. On tonight's evidence the current state-of-the-art view of the Trio Basso's chosen instruments is that they are, above all, generators of harmonics – all the trio pieces favour the upper end of the frequency range and are, as an inevitable consequence, also much concerned with micro-tonal tunings. The first half – Huber's trio *mit Stabpanderei* (1983) and the three solo pieces – is pretty-academic stuff, except for the Xenakis, which is despatched with great gusto by Wolfgang Güttler. The second half opens with Grosskopf's *Chaos* (1984), three contrasting movements, each of which is sub-divided into clearly characterised sections in which particular rhythms, textures or playing techniques predominate. Grosskopf is like the other composers in his extensive use of high natural harmonics, but otherwise the clarity of his musical thought is quite disorientating after so much obfuscation. As in *Lichtknall* his music is deceptively plain – periodic rhythms abound in *Chaos* – and maddeningly hard to categorise – it's not 'systemic' yet there's some sort of system at work; it's not 'tonal' yet tonal centres do seem to emerge at regular intervals. Finally, there's another trio, this one by the GDR-based composer and conductor Friedrich Goldmann. His *Trio* (1986) is a four-movement work, a little reminiscent of Kurtag perhaps in its clear and economical characterization of each movement and (blessed relief after the long-winded German music of the first half) in its terseness of expression.

30 November

The Michael Gordon Philharmonic come to Berlin on their first European visit (the Huddersfield Festival was an earlier venue on the same tour) playing, like Rhys Chatham, at the Naunynstrasse Ballhaus. Gordon's publicity boasts a Steve Reich quote,

'Michael Gordon . . . up to something real' (*what* came in that gap?), but the music is repetitive without being Reichian. Michael Gordon is a 31-year-old Yale graduate and his Philharmonic is a six-man band – percussion, clarinet, violin, viola, electric guitar, synthesizer – with a guitarist suffering from a bad attack of *rictus lead-guitaristicus*. They play four Gordon compositions, of which the oldest dates from 1981 and of which the two most recent – *Strange Quiet* (1985) and another piece so new it's still untitled – are much the best. Harmonically the music is quite fluid, closer to late Britten than to any of its minimalist forebears (and the new work has a string coda with a nagging but unplaceable similarity to something in, I think, Britten's Third Quartet). The pieces are sectional, *Strange Quiet* so much so that a pause in the middle provokes applause, but the good sections are very enjoyable. Towards the end of *Strange Quiet* there's an outbreak of polytemporal playing, high up on all the instruments' ranges, that works really well, and Gordon's musicians play well too, duly getting two encores. In the wake of the Chatham and King evenings it's good to hear new *American* music in the minimalist tradition that can bear comparison with pre-symphonic Reich, Glass and Adams or with current Nyman, Bryars and Man Jumping.

10 December

My last encounter of any significance with the Berlin music-scene is a lecture at the Technische Universität by Georg Katzer (b.1935). Katzer, widely regarded as one of the GDR's leading composers[4] is the star of a series of open lectures on electro-acoustic music, organised by the Technische Universität's studio director Folkemar Hein, and his lecture is witty and informative. Katzer's music is available on record, although none of his records was actually available in East Berlin when I tried to buy one, but his enthusiastic West Berliner audience seemed to know neither his music nor much about the new-music scene on the other side of the Wall. Facilities for electro-acoustic music in the GDR are available but are not particularly advanced, and Katzer has done most of his electro-acoustic work in other countries, in Stockholm, Bourges, Bratislava and Freiburg.

Katzer's tape music is strongly influenced by the 'hörstück' (radio piece) tradition: he makes pieces with a clear narrative and/or documentary purpose, rather than electro-acoustic abstractions. Indeed, his work seemed less interesting when it was most refinedly 'musical' – *Heiter, ma non troppo* (1987), a piece for guitar and the live-electronic wizardry of the Freiburg studio, was a disappointing, if colourful, ramble – and most engaging when it dealt with a clearly defined subject, whether that be the Cretan labyrinth *before* Ariadne interfered, or Francis Bacon's 17th-century evocation of sonic utopias. Most powerful of all was a new piece, *Aides memoires*, which takes as its primary source-material recordings of the Nazi leaders in full rhetorical flood. The piece is structured as a sequence of linked 'Alptraümer' (nightmares) in which these voices are collaged, electronically modulated and juxtaposed with other sounds, mostly music of the thirties and forties, although perhaps the most arresting moment comes near the end when a brief extract from the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is framed by wailing, child-like voices. Katzer's confrontation with what must remain a preoccupying question about Nazism, 'How German is it?' (to borrow the title of Walter Abish's splendid novel), is uncompromising and by no means unequivocal – at the end there is no hopeful apotheosis, just the chilling voice of Goebbels.

* * *

And so back to England and an attempt to draw some sort of conclusion from three months of impressions. America, and especially New York, is evidently a strong influence in West Berlin's artistic life – a legacy of the thorough 'internationalisation' of German culture that the US authorities instituted in the post-war years (the foundation of both the Darmstadt Ferienkurse and, later, the Berlin Kunstlerprogramm, were as much American as German initiatives). However, Americanism is always tempered by an authentically European sensibility, blunting its aggressive edge, deepening its range of cultural reference. But most striking of all was the impression of cultural well-being in West Berlin: the arts there are well supported, at the box-office and through proper state subsidy, so that instead of having to struggle continually for money artists can devote themselves to their real work. As a refugee from Great Britain plc, I found it enormously liberating to be in the sort of artistic climate where risks can be taken, instead of in one where most new music oozes the fear of failure and where philistinism is allowed to dress up respectably as 'market-consciousness'.

[1] John Cage, *Music of Changes*, played by Herbert Henck (piano), WERGO 60099.

[2] In 1949 GDR composer Paul Dessau also made a musical version of Brecht's piece with Brecht's collaboration, the opera *Die Verurteilung des Lucullus*. For King's version I sat next to a Dessau enthusiast who claimed to be unable to trace any but the most superficial resemblance to its supposed original.

[3] Miles Davis, *Tutu* (1986), WEA 925 490-4

[4] See Fritz Hennenberg, 'Who follows Eisler? Notes on Six Composers of the GDR', *Contact 24* (Spring 1982), p8.

Contributors to this Issue

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Susan Bradshaw studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Harold Craxton and Howard Ferguson and afterwards in Paris, on a French Government Scholarship, with Pierre Boulez. She presently teaches piano at Goldsmiths' College, University of London, and composition at the London College of Music.

Diana Burrell studied music at Cambridge and worked as a teacher and viola-player before composition took over. First performances in 1988 include *Io!* and *Io-shadow!* (by the Orchestra of St. John's, Smith Square; conductor, John Lubbock), *Landscape* (a piece for chamber orchestra commissioned by the St. James Piccadilly Festival), and a work for cello and piano for the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival (October) in which she is to be featured composer. She also co-runs the East London Late Starters Orchestra.

Christopher Fox Composer, performer and lecturer in art and design. He will be a member of the Composers' Forum at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik this summer, when the Arditti Quartet will play his *Heliotrope 6*. In 1987 he lived in West Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Berliner Kunstlerprogramm.

Linda Hirst A respected interpreter of 20th-century music who regularly premières important new works. She frequently sings with the London Sinfonietta and has worked, among others, with Berio, Ligeti and Henze. Her career includes appearances at many international festivals, and in this year's Prom season she will sing in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and perform Berio's *Recital*. An album by Linda Hirst, *Songs Cathy Sang*, a tribute to Cathy Berberian, has recently been released by Virgin classics.

Keith Potter Writer on new music; Lecturer in Music at Goldsmiths' College, University of London. Now a regular reviewer for *The Musical Times* and *The Times Literary Supplement*; he will be teaching at the University of Redlands, California from January 1989 on an exchange with the American composer Barney Childs.

Rhian Samuel is a lecturer at Reading University. Her *Elegy-Symphony* (1981) was premièred by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (conductor, Leonard Slatkin), and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1983), for chorus and orchestra, received the Rudolf Nissim Award of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. Her *Songs of Earth and Air* are available on CORONET 3127.

Richard Toop Musicologist and Head of the School of Musicology of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music in Sydney.

Margaret Lucy Wilkins has been a Senior Lecturer in Music at Huddersfield Polytechnic since 1976. Her compositions have been broadcast by the BBC, performed at many festivals (including Edinburgh, Cheltenham and Huddersfield), and abroad in Europe and Canada. She has been a Council member of the SPNM and is currently an Executive Committee member of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain.

Trevor Wishart is an internationally-established composer living in the North of England whose output includes *Red Bird*, *Tuba Mirum* and *Anticredos*; his experimental multimedia projects of the seventies are well known as is his contribution to music education. A number of his works employ computer technology about which he published the book *On Sonic Art* in 1985, and this year's Promenade Concerts will see the first performance of the complete *Vox* cycle reflecting his recent exploration of new vocal techniques.

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