

# contact

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January 29th: Birmingham and Midland Institute

The Chasm: Judith Jones (soprano)  
Simon Desorgher (flute) Peter Lawson (piano)

The programme for this concert by three talented young musicians showed that there were to be eleven items of a variety that suggested a very fragmentary kind of listening experience. For me this was not so, as I became fascinated by the way each piece dealt with its own formal problems, and the success of the concert was in a large way due to the success of the composers in giving a satisfactory formal basis to their ideas, however far away these seemed to get from conventionality.

In listening to music one has not heard before, one always wonders if the performers are playing what is written. I was able, rather meanly, to check on Peter Lawson and Simon Desorgher in their playing of Boulez's Sonatine by following the score and was filled with admiration for their account of that incredible piece. Judith Jones showed that she has considerable technique in her virtuoso performance of Cathy Berberian's Stripsody, a voice piece using strip-cartoon pictures and noises which the performer must interpret and build up into 'stories' that convey their meaning to the audience. None of the music chosen, however, gave her much of a chance to show off her actual voice.

S.T. Coleridge once said that poetry often made "events which appear to go in a straight line assume a circular motion - the snake with its tail in its mouth". It was of this that I thought as I listened to most of the music. Philip Lane's Colloquy 1, Varese's Density 21.5, Anthony Gilbert's Incredible Flute Music, Simon Desorgher's taped Film Score, and even the simple Cage piece Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs - all returned in the end to their beginnings, however far they had gone from them. The Philip Lane, written for Lawson and Desorgher and being given its first performance, was an attractive piece with a feeling of coherence, the freer improvisatory sections always fitting in well with the refrains. The two pieces which did not have a snake structure were Peter Lawson's own piano piece Momenta 94 and the Boulez. The virtuoso piano piece is built up to 94 three-bar 'moments', all generated from one initial motif in a logical manner. While this would presumably only be obvious from an examination of the score, one still felt the building up of different sets of 'moments' and their return and development, and, perhaps through Peter Lawson's playing, the whole piece made a powerful impression.

An improvisation by the group, and Judith Jones's performance of Christian Wolff's Song, highlighted one problem in contemporary music - the method of improvising with the voice. In the Wolff, and the Berberian, partly determined or previously worked out, the vocals and consonants used were satisfactory. In the improvisation, the singer

seemed happiest , and sounded most convincing when she abandoned word-type structures at all, and presented direct emotions. Perhaps something could be learned from jazz singers on this point.

The two taped pieces presented another problem - just what to do with the boundless possibilities of electronic sound. Simon Desorgher's tape worked for me because we had been told that it had been written to accompany a film on Stonehenge. I was therefore prepared to relate the altered organ sounds to my impression of Stonehenge and enjoyed it for that reason - especially the "celestial music of the spheres" section. But without the pictorial spur I wonder how I would have listened. The Varese tape Poeme Electronique related very much to known sounds and for that reason I found it irritating - is this all that can be done with such exciting possibilities?

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