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Reviews

Since we began reviewing new books on contemporary music in CONTACT 7 we have slowly built up to a position where we are now attempting to comment on all important new books and reissues that relate to music which is a) composed, in the main, since 1945 and b) judged by us to be of considerable musical significance. As far as space allows, we will continue to uphold this policy in the future, though the lists for forthcoming books from publishers look excitingly long enough at the moment for us to warn that it may not be possible for all new books to receive up-to-the-minute attention. While not wishing to turn half the magazine into a review of books, we believe that CONTACT should publish significant - and where necessary (as in the Adorno review in this issue) extended - comment by specialists, on books not all of which are adequately covered by other periodicals.

Scores, however, are a different matter. Of course, in one very basic sense, they are much more important than books, but there are so many of them and it is not easy to comment on all new scores usefully. (It's not so much the scores, but the music which matters.) CONTACTS 6-9 aimed at an extensive coverage of the scores in the EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC CATALOGUE and further reviews of new publications from this source will follow in future issues, since we believe experimental music to be important and frequently ignored by other magazines. From this issue onwards, we aim to present comment on just a few of the most outstanding scores which are newly available from commercial publishers; neither choice nor omission is intended to reveal any important stylistic bias.

Robin Holloway: Evening with Angels

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (£5.00)

Bernard Rands: Metalepsis 2

UNIVERSAL EDITION (£2.50)

Robin Holloway has a growing reputation as a serious-minded composer who is forging a uniquely personal style. Although the work takes its title from a poem of Wallace Stevens, Evening With Angels (1972) for chamber orchestra received its prime impetus from Tennyson's verses. This is typical of the literary inspiration of much of Holloway's work.

Evening With Angels lasts over half an hour and is impressively argued. Holloway labels the work as having nine movements, although this point might be debated, since the ninth movement appears parenthetically inside the eighth. The symmetry is satisfying: movements II, IV, VI and VIII present a refrain, III and VII are scherzos - malincolico and giocoso respectively, I and IX a prelude and postlude, while at the centre is V, a chorale-like adagio which is a wordless setting of 'Now sleeps the crimson petal'. The material is handled economically and imaginatively and 'developed' in the traditional sense, rather than used in block-form. Holloway's predilection for quoting Schumann and Brahms is now quite well known; however, nothing in this score leaps to the eye as a borrowing, although from time to time the music hovers on the brink of major-minor tonality.

By comparison, the quotation of the Benedictus from Palestrina's Missa Ut re mi fa sol la in Bernard Rands' Metalepsis 2 (1971) is perfectly obvious. Metalepsis 2 is a setting for mezzo-soprano, small (amplified) choir and twelve instrumentalists of 'Hymn to Steel: for five million human voices' by John Wain. The composer directs that "the work should be performed in the spirit of a Requiem (with no denominational bias) for those who suffer and die as a result of tyrannies - commercial, political and religious". The names of Henry Ford, Mao Tse-Tung and Stalin are sung by the choir and it would seem that the quotation of the Benedictus is an ironical gesture directed against gentlemen such as these - "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". (The text is used to the same effect in Peter Maxwell Davies' Taverner.) I have no doubt that this is an important work which makes its point effectively.

Finally, a word on the production of these scores. The Rands is in the usual UE format and is impeccably laid-out and printed. The Holloway is a facsimile of the composer's manuscript, which although in an admirably clear hand is naturally less legible than a traditionally engraved score. It seems inevitable as the economic crisis bites harder that this is the form in which more and more scores by British composers will be appearing; however, it would be a sad and retrograde step if we were to come to regard it as the norm.